

Social Justice in Fiji Christian Perspectives

Dr Lynda Newland

2006

A Report for the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education and Advocacy (ECREA)



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FOREWORD

THE JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

There is a very long tradition concerning social justice in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is found principally in the Old Testament, the New Testament, the early Fathers of the Christian Church and in the public statements of the Churches in recent years.

The Old Testament Tradition

In the Old Testament God reveals himself to his people initially in the events of the *Exodus* (cf Exodus 2:23- 3:15). He is a God who intervenes in human history because he is concerned about a group of poor people who are being oppressed in Egypt. In Exodus (3:7-8) he says that he *sees* the injustice and oppression suffered by the people, he *hears* their cries for deliverance, his heart is *moved with compassion* for them and he decides to *act* in order to liberate them from slavery and lead them into a new land. Because the people experience God in a new way, they call him by a new name – Yahweh – the God who is alive and active, who can hear the cries of the poor and be moved by situations of oppression.

In the *Covenant* God makes with this people they are told that they must act towards others with the same kind of love and compassion as Yahweh had shown towards them. The sentiments of Yahweh's heart were to find an echo in the hearts of his people in their dealings with one another. There was to be no injustice among Yahweh's people and they were to show special concern for the poor, the weak, the needy, widows, orphans and strangers. Deuteronomy 15:4 expresses Yahweh's desire that: "There are to be no poor among you". Institutions such as the Sabbatical Year (Leviticus 25:1-7; Deuteronomy 15:1-11) and the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:6-17) set in place mechanisms to restore justice and greater equality in society. Even though they were given Israel as their promised land, they were to share their land with strangers who came to live among them (cf Ezekiel 47:21-22).

The *Prophets* were very significant people in terms of social justice in the Old Testament. They saw what was happening in the world of their time and, because they had something of the mind and heart of Yahweh, they felt impelled to speak out in God's name about the abuses that were taking place. They not only upheld fidelity and obedience to Yahweh but stressed that Yahweh demanded respect and concern among the people for each another. Consequently the prophets spoke out strongly against injustice, exploitation, excessive wealth and oppression of the poor (Isaiah 58:1-8; Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 7:22-25). They reminded the people that Yahweh would always repudiate any form of worship or fasting which was not accompanied by caring and just relationships among his people (Isaiah 1:11-17; Amos 5:21-24). Often the prophets stood up as the defenders of the poor and advocated their cause against the great and powerful. Thus Nathan before King David defended Uriah, abused and dead. Elijah rose up in defence of Naboth, despoiled of his land and assassinated by King Ahab. Amos accused the businessmen of his time of exploiting the poor in order to make greater profits for themselves (Amos 8:4-7).

Marcus Borg (2004:130) describes the classical prophets of ancient Israel – Amos, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah – as "God-intoxicated voices of protest against the human suffering created by the unjust systems imposed by the powerful and wealthy".

The New Testament Tradition

Yahweh's demand for justice and concern for the poor took on human flesh and blood in the person of *Jesus of Nazareth*. He announced his mission in terms of the poor and needy and a return to the ideals of the Covenant (Luke 4:16ff). He spent much of his time in the company of the poor, the marginalised, the sinners and the sick of his time and spoke out in the tradition of the prophets against various forms of injustice.

The great enthusiasm of Jesus' life and the central theme of his teaching was the *Kingdom of God*. He felt that he was sent by his Father to proclaim the message of the Kingdom (Luke 4:43) and he urged his followers also to be enthusiastic for the Kingdom when he said: "Make the Kingdom of God your top priority and everything else will fall into its proper perspective" (Matthew 6:33).

Jesus never gave a clear definition of the Kingdom. Instead he imparted his vision of it through a series of parables, the miracles he worked, the people he associated with and the way he lived his own life. For Jesus the Kingdom was the symbol which enshrined the dream of his Father for how our world should be. It demands a radical change of mind and heart (*metanoia*) and affects our vision of what life is about as well as our values and who we relate to. One of the central demands of the Kingdom is how people treat each other – especially the poor, the sick, outcasts, sinners, women, the unloved and unwanted. Jesus is critical of all that is opposed to the kingdom – the rich who refuse to share with the poor and the religious authorities who advocate a code of religious purity which separates and oppresses people. His great command was to love one another.

The Kingdom is not just something that belongs to another world. It will grow here and now as the followers of Jesus create an alternative society demonstrating what the world is "not yet" but one day will be if we strive to shape history to the pattern of God's design. It involves a visible socio-economic-political restructuring of this world – the creation of a more just, compassionate and inclusive society.

Philip Yancey (1995) makes the following assessment:

"A society that welcomes people of all races and social classes, that is characterized by love and not division, that cares most for its weakest members, that stands for justice and righteousness in a world enamored with selfishness and decadence, a society in which members compete for the privilege of serving one another – this is what Jesus meant by the Kingdom of God."

The Early Fathers of the Christian Church

The letters of Paul, John and James in the New Testament show that Jesus' concern for the poor and for a just society are continued in the early communities of Christians. In the Acts of the Apostles (2:44-45; 4:32-34) we are told of the amazing sharing that took place in the first Christian communities so that the poor were cared for and "there was no one in the group who was in need".

John (1 John 4:19-20) stresses an important principle for any discussion of social justice in a Christian context. He states: "If someone says he loves God, but hates his brother, he is a liar. For he cannot love God, whom he has not seen, if he does not love his brother, whom he has seen." And he gives a good example of this when he writes: "If a rich person sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against his brother, how can he claim that he loves God? (1 John 3:17)"

Ambrose of Milan, John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea are just a few of the leaders in the early Church who preached a strong message of social justice. Their writings speak out in defence of the

poor and severely criticize the rich for not sharing their wealth with those in need. For example Basil writes:

"The bread in your cupboard belongs to the hungry; the cloak in your wardrobe belongs to the naked; the shoes you let rot belong to those who go barefoot; the money in your safe belongs to the destitute."

One of the themes which appears regularly is: God made the world for the benefit of all. Hence no one is justified in keeping for his/her own exclusive use what he/she does not need when others lack the necessities of life. If anyone is rich, he/she must act as a steward of God helping to share and distribute what belongs to all.

Another theme is that Jesus identifies himself with the poor in a special way. He is to be found not only in heaven or in churches but is present also in the persons of the poor. Hence special love and concern must be shown to them.

Recent Statements of the Christian Churches

Statements of the World Council of Churches and Papal Encyclicals (especially over the last 120 years) as well as statements from various local Churches have constantly addressed issues of social justice in an industrialized, modernized and globalised world. Statements have been made about the economy, racism and discrimination, war, wages, worker's rights, poverty and inequality, care for the environment, the right to go on strike and so on.

Some of the principles which emerge are:

The human dignity of everyone is to be recognized;

All are equal in the eyes of God;

The resources of the earth are to be shared by all;

The economy is to be structured for the good of all the people – not just the few;

Human work takes precedence over both capital and technology in the process of production;

Just wages are to be paid and the rights of workers to form trade unions and to go on strike (under certain conditions) are to be respected.

Authentic human development is more than purely economic development and must be integral i.e. it has to promote the good of every person and of the whole person;

Special concern must be shown towards the poor and disadvantaged. Christians need to show a "preferential option for the poor"

Economic systems must be carefully examined. Both capitalism and socialism have their faults and limitations.

All these principles are meant to assist Christians to see what is necessary if the *Kingdom of God* is to become a reality in the context of modern society.

A very significant statement was made at the 1971 Synod of Bishops Held in Rome on the topic of *Justice in the World*:

"Action on behalf of justice and participation in the transformation of the world fully appear to us to be a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel, or in other words, of the Church's mission for the redemption of the human race and its liberation from every oppressive situation."

In other words, social justice is not an added extra to the Christian message. Rather it is an integral part of that message.

Kevin J. Barr

Introduction

This report was commissioned by the Ecumenical Centre for Research, Education, and Advocacy (ECREA) with the objectives of:

- Exploring different perspectives of social justice held by Christian churches in Fiji;
- Analysing how social justice issues impact on the lives and identities of individuals in different communities in Fiji;
- And encouraging a greater commitment on the part of the churches to social justice.

As ECREA is a Christian ecumenical organisation, it is particularly concerned with the views of Christian churches. However this study takes a holistic approach in order to show the diversity of issues and religious views held by different groups within the community in Fiji.

Because it has come to be applied widely, part one of this document summarises a basic historical background in relation to the development of specific schools of thought about social justice from the Christian perspective. Some of the values behind the concept of social justice are also shared in secular interpretations of human rights, and, indeed, there are certain historical moments when these ideas converged. As the aim is to explore Christian perspectives, the relationship between social justice and human rights is only briefly dealt with. I then locate these ideas in the framework of churches in Fiji in order to show some of the general trends in local theologies.

We are faced with social injustice at this time in part because of the social structures created during colonisation, and structures such as the political division between Fijians and 'Others', the way land and rental is distributed, and policies that decide who has access to education are further entrenching divisions in the community. Globalisation, experienced for example in global sugar prices and the entry of multinationals in garment production and tourism is producing new and added pressures, with the result that many aspects of socio-economic life are in transition. Thus, in the second section, I explore the background to many of the social issues that emerged during the fieldwork part of the project, including: race, religion, class and land, poverty, education, families and sexuality.

The second part of the report focuses upon fieldwork conducted as part of this project. This includes the methodology along with a description of the fieldwork results, gained from different Think Tanks, an interfaith meeting, interviews and focus groups. Broadly, the fieldwork aimed to uncover communities' ideas of social justice and the issues that are currently affecting them. Many of the issues raised are personalised responses to the broader themes discussed in the second chapter, but have an immediacy which give insights into the way these pressures are experienced by those who are finding themselves increasingly on the margins of society. They also raise questions about current church participation and more effective ways that church projects might be managed in future.

Theologies and Philosophies of Social Justice

In this section, I outline some of the major movements that have helped to develop ideas about social justice in Christian Churches and how these have intersected with secular understandings of human rights. Given the limitations on space, this is by no means a comprehensive exploration, but rather aims to highlight some of the historical interpretations of social justice in Christian thought from the late 1800s until today that are relevant to the fieldwork results in the second half of the report.

Within Christianity, perspectives on social justice and possibilities for practice differ greatly. Historic mainline churches such as the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian churches have well-articulated international traditions in social justice.¹ The Methodist Church overseas shares these traditions, although in Fiji the Methodist Church has become a more complex institution because of its associations with indigenous Fijian tradition. By contrast, the plethora of new Christian groups that have emerged from the Pentecostal/evangelical revival generally have a very different notion of the place of social justice due to an emphasis on salvation, but sometimes they also undertake social projects.² All of these views have ramifications for the kinds of social projects that may be undertaken by the churches.

Methodists and others had played a leading role in the campaign to abolish slavery in the early nineteenth century, and the social role of the church was discussed intensively in both the Roman Catholic and the Protestant Churches by the end of the century.³ With regard to the sociological context of church teachings the German theologian, Troeltsch, argued that the Christian ethos was dualistic, presenting both an individualistic relationship with God which required renunciation of all which impeded this relationship, and a community ethos (Troeltsch, 1960:999). This Christian ethos was concerned with placing “each human being in circumstances where natural differences can and should be transmuted into the ethical values of mutual recognition, confidence and care for others” (Troeltsch, 1960:1005). In order that both of these aspects are fulfilled, new forms of Christianity were constantly emerging in response to the social context of the day.

In the United States, the Protestant Social Gospel Movement emerged principally in response to two things: large-scale social change brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation, and individualistic and conservative theological interpretations and factors such as social Darwinism.⁴ It grew out of a pious educated middleclass that was morally and intellectually dissatisfied by the way others were suffering (May, 1967). Theologians who exemplified this movement included Rauschenbusch, Gladden, Strong, Ely, Ransom, and Ward, although there were also many others (Goddard, 1999; Rossinow, 2005). The movement tended to focus on communities that “were predominately white, male, immigrant factory workers and their families” (Goddard, 1999: 227), and gained momentum in reaction to the large-scale unemployment, industrial strikes and industrial

¹ Ernst defines historic mainline churches in opposition to the Pentecostal movement's emphasis on the 'baptism of the Holy Spirit', gifts such as healing and prophecy, speaking in tongues, and the premillennial second coming of Jesus (Ernst, 1994:13).

² The views of Seventh-day Adventists (SDA), Latter-day Saints of the Church of Jesus Christ (LDS), and the Jehovah's Witnesses are not treated here, although a representative of LDS does give some indication of his Church's beliefs at the Interfaith Search meeting (see fieldwork section).

³ According to Troeltsch, for instance, ideas that churches must be actively involved in promoting social equality are far from obsolete. He argued that, while Jesus focused on the plight of the poor, the teachings of Jesus and the early church were not to radically transform the class relations of that society but instead offered philosophy, theology and ethics (Troeltsch, 1960: 40).

⁴ This movement began to emerge in the 1970s although it was not commonly referred to as Social Gospel until about 1910 and, as a movement, was influential until the 1930s (May, 1967: 170).

disasters of the period (Rossinow, 2005). While the movement incorporated diversity in theology and method, common elements of the movement included its emphasis on social and collective sins over those of the individual, the belief that progress could create the Kingdom of God on earth, its affinity for workers and socialism, and the idea that the Church should be active on all days of the week in providing care for the marginalised (Goddard, 1999: 228).

Although the rural-based Methodist Church had lagged behind other churches in advocating the Social Gospel Movement, Ward, a Methodist theologian, wrote a document that became the 'Social Creed for Methodism', which included demands for higher wages, a day of rest every week, protective legislation for workers generally but specifically targeting women and children, and other loftier demands. This was adopted by the Northern Baptists, the Presbyterians and the Congregationalists, and other churches also followed in the next decade, so that Ward's document became known more broadly as the 'Social Creed of Churches'. Ward himself was considered radical at that time in claiming that Marxism and Christianity were compatible with regard to social justice based on brotherhood and advocacy of the poor (Rossinow, 2005).

From the 1860s, the Roman Catholic Church had also been wrestling with disruptions such as the social impact of industrialisation and socio-political revolutions. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII issued the encyclical, *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labour/ The Modern Situation). It sought to make governments accountable for the protection of workers in Europe and North America from exploitation and poverty, and make employers accept their moral duty to pay wages. The encyclical also affirmed the principle that the Church has a duty to speak out on social issues (Barr, 1994). Seventy years later, the year before Vatican II, Pope John XXII issued the encyclical, *Mater et Magistra* (Mother and Teacher), which reaffirmed basics of Catholic social teaching, but also aimed to develop certain ideas in relation to the contemporaneous problems and issues of the day. He strongly affirmed that the right to private property was subordinate to the fact that goods of the earth are for all (Dorr, 1991).

Further to this, development had ensued in much of Latin America, benefiting urban areas but further impoverishing rural peasantry. The resulting poverty inspired both a secular sociological critique of development called Dependency Theory (which theorised that rich nations profit at the expense of the poor) and Catholic liberation theology, which used sociological analyses of poverty as the basis for social action (Levine, 1979; Beyer, 2000; Kater, 2001). Both Dependency Theory and liberation theology theorise the need to construct a new social order but the aim of Dependency Theory is a new economic order while liberation theology is premised on a new political order.

Leaders of liberation theology described the poor in ways such as coming "with their poverty on their back" (de la Casas cited in Gutierrez, 1984:4), "with their suffering, their culture, their odour, their race, their language, and the exploitation they are experiencing." Liberation theology called the poor to claim their rights and change the oppressive structures that made them poor. However, while it offered a clear critique of class relations, at its emergence, it also tended to undervalue other forms of marginalisation such as race and gender (Beyer, 2000).

Liberation theology further influenced the Catholic Church through Vatican II. Held from 1962-5, Vatican II is remembered for its attempts to modernise the Catholic Church and make it more relevant to the 20th Century (Angrosino, 1994). In the theology of Vatican II, all men (and women) were considered equal, discrimination must be halted, and therefore economic and social disparity was considered a scandal that militated “against social justice, equity, human dignity, as well as social and international peace” (Flannery, 1992:930). Vatican II also placed a new emphasis on the importance of local cultures with the result that local churches were asked to work out culturally appropriate procedures with their congregations. This had the effect of changing the relationship between the laity and the priesthood as the laity was no longer simply viewed as a flock that followed the priests but were now expected to be more active (Angrosino, 1994).

Secondly, in order to better theorise poverty, Vatican II opened up its teachings to influences from the Social Sciences including thinkers such as Karl Marx, which, in Latin America, resulted in Christian-Marxist alliances (Levine, 1979). According to Dorr, Vatican II also added other elements such as: relating peace between nations with the notion of a just international order; proposing a notion of human development; where “the poor have a right to a fair share of the earth’s resources” (Dorr, 1991:53); and making it policy that the Church will relinquish its political privileges when these may compromise their teachings.

Pope Paul VI then issued the encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (On the Development of Peoples) in 1967, which laid down a theology of development, opposing economic domination of poorer countries and calling for a new international economic order. In this document, he carefully noted that a revolutionary uprising might be appropriate in extreme circumstances (Dorr, 1991).

The Medellín conference held a year later is seen by many as pivotal for the development and legitimisation of liberation theology, due to three major areas of agreement. Firstly, it built on Pope Paul VI’s encyclical to justify the use of counter-violence to “undo the inherent, institutionalised violence of the established order, replacing it with a more just society” (Levine, 1979:13). Secondly, sin was reaffirmed as inclusive of whole social systems, which therefore required the Church to take an active role on the part of the poor (Levine, 1979). In becoming more involved with the poor, bishops helped to organise Basic Christian Communities (BCCs) in order to raise consciousness and develop methods for changing the system (Gutierrez, 1984; Beyer, 2000). Ultimately, this also changed the churches’ emphasis from maintaining political stability to actively challenging social and political systems (Dorr, 1991). Thirdly, the meeting led to an analysis of the sources and meaning of poverty.

Three years after the Medellín conference in 1971, Pope Paul VI issued the *Octogesima Adveniens* (acknowledging the eightieth anniversary of the *Rerum Novarum*), which acknowledged that economic problems may require political solutions, which can be interpreted to mean that Christians should become involved “in the political struggle for social justice” (Dorr, 1991:57). Further, it was recognised that there may not be solutions of universal applicability but that different regions may

need different approaches. In the same year, a Synod of bishops in Rome produced the document, *Justice in the World*, which advocated that social justice required action and that this is “a constitutive dimension of the preaching of the gospel” (Dorr, 1991:58).

While the Church has not always been unified in its application of policy, John Paul II issued an encyclical which recognised the worker’s contribution. In 1988, he also produced a document on the equality between men and women, although he has strongly resisted on the ordination of women on the basis that Christ’s disciples were men. Two years later, he also analysed systemic forms of poverty in relation to ecology, using examples of unjust land distribution (Dorr, 1991).

Moreover, the Encyclicals and the history of conferences indicate that, in Catholic teaching, social justice requires Christians to be active, on the side of the poor and oppressed. This may involve political action, when appropriate.

It is also notable that many of these teachings coincided with the theologies that emerged from the Protestant Social Gospel Movement and from later theologies that emerged from churches under oppressive regimes in Germany and South Africa. For instance, some church leaders resisted the Nazi attempt to control the churches in Germany and together issued the Barmen Declaration, which proclaimed that the Church was not subject to State but to the Word of God. Likewise, 150 theologians produced the *Kairos Document* in protest against the State’s abuse of power in South Africa. Then, in the meetings of the World Council of Churches (WCC), which was established in 1948, many historic mainline churches agreed with many of the principles expressed in the encyclicals and conferences of the Roman Catholic Church. These meetings focused on the poor and also on the structural dimensions of racism, sexism, violence, the relationship between First and Third World countries, and the rights of indigenous peoples (Dorr, 1991).

For instance, the theme of the 1948 meeting of the WWC was ‘The Responsible Society’. A set of criteria was drawn up by which societies were asked to work out an appropriate balance between freedom, order and justice. This was then broadened out considerably in the next meeting four years later. Church and State collaboration was assessed and the notion of a ministry of reconciliation was emphasised in the effort to combat racism. The 1966 conference in Geneva was important because it was held a few months after Vatican II, and it showed the convergence between Roman Catholic and Protestant thought (Dorr, 1991). For instance, the WCC affirmed the need for Christians to participate in revolutions against the rich and powerful. One Presbyterian missionary working in Brazil argued:

There are indications that something great and terrible is going to happen. The foundations of the world are shaking. The powerful are constructing fortresses of money and arms. They became rich and their pride grew on the dead. The bankers, the dictators, the rich countries, the armies of the right and left... But all over the world a great sigh is raised, the sigh of the poor, of the oppressed...And this sigh is more than a human sigh: it is the sigh of God. The cry of those who suffer: the vengeance of our God (cited in Kater, 2001).

Like the South American Catholics who endorsed Liberation Theology, Protestants were also focusing on the plight of the poor caught in wider oppressive systems.

While racism was emphasised in the fourth conference, the fifth conference focused on women, who were now 22% of the participants of the WWC. Subsequent conferences explored the morality of violence, the human role with regard to Creation, the relationship between the Third World and the First, and the need to improve women's involvement in decision-making (Dorr, 1991). In 1990, the WCC further affirmed that: those in power are accountable to all and subject to God; the poor were preferred; people from all races, castes, and ethnic groups are equal in value; all structures of dominance which exclude women's theological contributions and women's participation in decision-making must be resisted; and "access to truth and education, information and means of communication are basic human rights" (cited in Dorr, 1991: 78-9). Rejecting military invasions and weapons of mass destruction and resisting the notion that Creation is merely for human exploitation, the WCC also affirmed that the land belongs to God and that the churches have a commitment in joining with indigenous communities to struggle "for their cultures, spirituality, rights to land and sea; with peasants, poor farmers and seasonal agricultural workers seeking land reform... and lastly that human rights are God-given" (Dorr, 1991:80-1). As explored in this report, such a broad sweep of ideas has interesting and contradictory ramifications in Fiji.

In all, the values of social justice emerging in the discourses of Protestant Churches, Roman Catholic Liberation Theology, and the WCC emphasise the plight of the poor (whether industrial workers of the Social Gospel tradition or rural peasantry of Liberation Theology) and the need for active church involvement in structural change. More recently, the discourses have broadened the notion of oppression to include racism, the oppression of women and indigenous peoples, and have acknowledged the need for the equal distribution of land and information. Notions of private property are less important to the churches than the concept that the earth is for everyone. As human rights are considered universal, the historic mainline churches' discourse on social justice has also incorporated values that have emerged in the secular world.

It was only after the Enlightenment that notions of individual, uniform and universal rights began to appear, although early notions of human rights have different implications from the way they are used today.⁵ While not conceptualised as human rights, civil and political rights were further developed as a result of the French Revolution and American Independence (Goodhart, 2003). Human rights were first formally conceptualised after World War II with the establishment of the United Nations, when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written and signed in 1948, but these were primarily political rights. From the 1960s, these rights were supplemented by further lists of social, economic, and cultural rights (Dorr, 1991). Since then, human rights have been used as a legal avenue through which national governments are asked to consider the place of marginalised groups in their society (Evans, 2005).⁶

In Fiji, the ideas of the WCC have been echoed in a report for the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC), which proclaims: that the poor must be a priority, and that the churches must take the role of conscience for society and eradicate oppressive structures (FCC Research Group, 2000).⁷ Referring

⁵ For instance, in John Locke's case, notions of equality justified the use of contracts, thus having the effect of promoting capitalism (Goodhart, 2003). By contrast, human rights are usually conceptualised now in terms of protecting marginalised communities from oppressive systems.

⁶ Due to limitations of space and the fact that this report focuses on the Christian perspective of social justice, I have not elaborated on the human rights discourse here, although it is also very important.

⁷ This research group was the predecessor to ECREA.

to the teachings of the prophets, the teachings of Jesus, the early Fathers, the Encyclicals and other Catholic documents, Kevin Barr's publications have strongly advocated that Catholics should be active in responding to the poor in Fiji, particularly the unjust living and working conditions of live-in housekeepers, cane-cutters, farm labourers, gardeners, widows, the sick and the elderly (Barr, 1994, 1991). Church members must take an interest in their society, keep the government transparent and accountable, ensure that human rights are protected, and make sure that elected representatives pursue the concerns of their people (Barr, 2004). If the members of the Church should be active, the Church itself must have the role of conscience for society, prepared to protest at injustice on the side of the poor and repressed and to empower them (Barr, 2004, 1994). For Barr, this is particularly necessary in view of the fact that Fijian tradition entails a culture of silence, where Fijians are required to remain passive and dependent (Barr, 2004).

Since the conversion of Ratu Cakobau in 1854 (Tuwere, 2002), the largest Christian church in Fiji has been the Methodist Church and its members are predominantly Fijian (see next chapter for more detail). Belonging to the WCC, the Methodist Church aims to fulfil God's rule by creating the Kingdom of God in Fiji, which is "the unification and salvation of all people," including Methodists and non-Christians like Muslims and Hindus. The Kingdom of God must manifest itself in all spheres of this world, including the political and the economic (Interview Waqairatu cited in Newland, forthcoming).

While the Methodist Church has an Indian Division, the Methodist Church has retained a predominantly Fijian focus. Thus, key social issues for Fijian Methodist leaders are HIV/AIDS, drugs (in particular, marijuana), unemployment, children leaving school, prostitution, and broken homes (Newland, forthcoming). However, these social issues are not necessarily seen in terms of systemic or structural oppression. Reverend Waqairatu, Assistant General Secretary to the Methodist Church, discussed the need to counsel squatters towards making correct decisions because they need to be taught how to manage their lives with the resources that they have, which includes managing the size of their families. In Waqairatu's view, the root of such problems is spiritual, which is exacerbated by ignorance. Thus, an option squatters might be counselled to take is to return to their villages as "every Fijian has land." They can also be assisted to set up home businesses and industries such as home-baking (Interview Waqairatu cited in Newland, forthcoming). This view suggests that people are entirely responsible for their own welfare, and that, if their relationship with God is correct, the rest of their lives will get better, a logic which resonates with the morality of village life regarding correct behaviour (see below). Moreover, the people discussed here seem to be entirely Fijian.

Because of the way Methodism became part of Fijian tradition (see next chapter), Methodism in Fiji (*lotu*) is bound with the principles of *matanitu* (the chiefly system) and *vanua* (land and community). As a result of the importance of the *matanitu*, villagers have defined roles and obligations in relation to their chiefs (Tuwere, 2002). With the philosophy that "if the chief and his family behaved well, the whole community would naturally be in order; conversely, when people saw trends of which they disapproved in the community they said that this reflected an immoral chief," as chiefs are expected

to grant lower-ranking members all their requests and to behave correctly, and, in return, the latter should be respectful and obedient (Brison, 1999: 102). Therefore, equality is not an ideal encouraged in the village community. Rather, there is an expectation that those in power will use it wisely for the benefit of their communities. Obedience is highly valued in return, and, the logic goes, if everyone behaves correctly, all will be prosperous.

Because the structure of the Methodist Church has become intrinsically related with the *vanua*'s social organisation, the Methodist theologian, Tuwere also notes that the *lotu* has been absorbed by the *vanua*, as evidenced by the idioms, *Na vanua na lotu, na lotu na vanua* (The church is the land, the land the church), *lotu vaka-vanua* (Christianity in the communal way, which is bound to the land), and the Nationalist dictum, *Noqu Kalou, noqu vanua* (My God, my land; Tuwere, 2002). The results of a survey conducted among Methodists supported this idea, with most respondents mentioning the *vanua*. One example was that 'salvation' was the most important doctrine because "salvation of the people from sin [literally, bad habits] is situated in the land, the customs of the land, the belief of the church, and the relationship between people, God and all of life" (Bush, 2001:27).

Moreover, Tuwere argues that, while *kalou* is Fijian for god, the second syllable, *lou* refers to the abundant spread of yam leaves just before harvest, and, with the incorporation of Christianity, God is therefore primarily experienced as the "Creator and source of all life" (Tuwere, 2002:59). As village life revolves around the seasons and harvests of gardens, the Fijian cosmology resonates more closely with the Old Testament and particularly with the story of the Exodus. Tuwere gives the example of the Israeli exiles' anguish at not being in their homeland of Canaan, when they sang, "By the rivers of Babylon – there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion. On the willows there we hung up our harps... How could we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137:1-4 as cited in Tuwere, 2002: 146), and notes that "God is seen here as a saviour and comforter whose presence is closely linked with the land" (Tuwere, 2002:146). In this way, the Old Testament offers Methodism in Fiji a theology of the land.

In an interview conducted in 2002, when large numbers of leases expired, the Indian Superintendent, Rev Immanuel Reuben, discussed priorities he wanted the Methodist Church to address, saying, "The most pressing issue... is the use and sharing of land" but that the Methodist Church is not involved in this issue because "they think the land belongs to them [the Fijians] and no one else" (Interview Reuben, cited in Newland, forthcoming). To put it another way, as Fijians are landlords and as they constitute the majority of Methodists, the Methodist Church has no collective interest in addressing the problem of expiring leases for the Indo-Fijian tenant farmers (see next chapter for more detail on lease expiries).

Significant also is the notion which surfaced during the 1987 coups and which has re-emerged periodically since and is held by Nationalist Methodists that Fiji should be a Christian State (see religion section in the next chapter). Of critical importance here is the fact that Fijian identity with the *vanua* of the village has been extended to include all land within the national borders. The idea

of the Christian State also refers back to the commonly held notion that Fijians who make up the majority of Christians should have paramountcy over others. According to Casimira, the notion of the Christian State is aimed at improving the morals of Fijians such as “the lack of respect for cultural and religious authority among young people and the educated, the rise of urban problems such as crime, prostitution, abandoned children and mothers, the perceived weakening of the chiefly system and its influence, and the breakdown in family values” (Casimira, 2002). However, it is also assumed that all other citizens in Fiji will benefit from the same creed. Again, there is an element of the idea that, when the community’s relationship with God is correct, the rest of the social order will fall into place.

While churches from the Pentecostal/evangelical tradition have been in Fiji from the early colonial days (for instance, the Assemblies of God have been in Fiji since 1926), a great number began to enter Fiji after independence in 1970 (Ernst, 1994).⁸ Ernst defines the Pentecostal movement in terms of its emphasis on the ‘baptism of the Holy Spirit’, gifts such as healing and prophecy, speaking in tongues, and the premillennial second coming of Jesus (Ernst, 1994:13). The evangelical tradition emphasises the Bible as the inspired word of God, interprets the Bible literally, believes in salvation and the physical resurrection of Jesus, and concentrates on the mission of reaching out to convert others (Ernst, 1994).⁹ For the sake of simplicity, here I refer to churches such as the Christian Mission Fellowship and the Christian Outreach Centre as Pentecostal/ Evangelical.

As a result of believing that the rapture or the End-Times are imminent, churches such as Assemblies of God, Christian Mission Fellowship, Christian Outreach Centre (Newland, forthcoming) promote the message that finding social justice in this world is not so important: rather, the fundamental issue is to allow God to save the individual’s soul. As individual salvation is equated with order in the self, it is then believed to order the individual’s outward relations with others. In other words, as one is saved, the rest of the world will ‘fall into place’: an idea that resonates with Fijian notions of correct behaviour in hierarchies and which, along with lively services, has proved to be remarkably attractive to Fijians because of it.¹⁰ Although social justice is not a priority for these churches, some of the churches that have emerged from this tradition do involve themselves in social projects. For instance, the Grace Baptist Church, which shares much of its philosophy with the broader movement, is in the process of opening a facility to help squatters in one of the squatter settlements in Suva; and the Evangelical Fellowship of Fiji is attempting to eradicate social issues such as marijuana abuse (Newland, forthcoming). However, the emphasis on social issues held by these churches is exceptional for churches in this movement.

Both social justice and human rights are articulated in Fiji law. The Constitutional Amendment Act of 1997 mentions social justice in relation to affirmative action, where parliament is obligated to take measures towards equal access of all groups/categories of persons in education and training, land

⁸ This revival first emerged in by William J. Seymour in Azusa Street, Los Angeles, and found adherents among young, poor, rural, white males (Mapes Anderson, 1979). Since then, it has become a global phenomenon.

⁹ A charismatic tradition also emerged within the historic mainline tradition with similar notions to Pentecostalism.

¹⁰ Kevin Barr of ECREA argues that many of the churches belonging to this movement are importing the extreme right wing capitalistic values of America. He argues that these churches create the expectation that being born again will bring with it material prosperity, and that they offer a highly emotional, demonstrative style of worship centred on the individual, which “prevents them from active engagement in addressing issues of poverty, justice and other social problems” (Barr, 1998b:2).

and housing, commerce and civil service without discrimination (Constitutional Amendment Act, 1997). Used for legislating affirmative action programs, the Act has been criticised for excluding disadvantaged Indo-Fijians and women (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005). In response, the government argues that 29 affirmative action policies were legislated, and of these: 17 are for all communities; 10 are exclusively for Fijians and Rotumans; and 2 are exclusively for other communities (Government of Fiji, 2005: 287). In practice, the affirmative action policies for Fijians seem to be most visible (see focus groups). Human rights have also been introduced into Fiji through the Constitution. However, many influential Christian leaders reject human rights as representing foreign values, especially in matters of women's equality, homosexuality and disciplining children (see fieldwork section of this report).¹¹

In this chapter, I have described the way that the history of social justice has been developed and articulated across both Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, and explored the way that some of these ideas have been either embraced or resisted by churches in Fiji. The following chapter aims to describe the contemporary social structure of Fiji in relation to its historical background and to provide an outline of how these forces have contributed to contemporary identities. As such, the chapter provides the context for the fieldwork results.

Social Justice Issues in Fiji

In Fiji, social justice issues have emerged across racial and religious communities. Many of these social issues have emerged from structures that were established in the colonial period and that have since become rigidified and, as a result, such structures now only serve a few people's interests. The global economy has also affected the lives of many, especially those involved in sugar production, garment factory work and tourism. In this section, I contextualise current social justice issues in relation to Fiji's colonial history and the impact of globalisation.

Of Indigenous Peoples, Race, and Politics

Fiji's political and social life has been dominated by the issue of inter-race and intra-race relationships, many of which were created through the processes of colonialism. As such, racial identity is politically the most important identity in Fiji,¹² where race is taken to mean natural or essential differences rather than culturally and historically created differences (which are usually glossed in the term 'ethnicity').¹³ Issues about race also intersect with other important issues related to religion, land, poverty, education, and gender.

Race has become institutionalised through national institutions such as the Great Council of Chiefs, the Fijian Affairs Board, the Native Land Trust Board, the race-based allocation of seats in parliament, franchise based on a communal roll (a separate roll for each race) and the *Vola Ni Kawa Bula* or

¹¹ For instance, Reverend Kurulo of the Christian Mission Fellowship argues that, "human rights are an imposition of foreign values that do not belong to the Fijian upbringing in the family and community, which requires the young to respect the old and treat others with dignity, love, and honour. In his view, the human rights lobby tends to over-emphasise the woman's perspective in marital disputes" (Newland, forthcoming). Reverend Nakanyaca of the Evangelical Fellowship "sees the Fijian traditions of respect in the family, which include women kneeling down and crawling on the floor to show their respect to men, as continuing to be important. While this entails a strict family order, men and women should respect each other and men should love their wives. Children must also be disciplined to know their place. The values expounded in the United Nations charter of human rights, therefore, are felt to be a foreign imposition. Homosexuality and the idea of women's empowerment are likewise foreign ideas that are breaking up the Fijian family" (Newland, forthcoming).

¹² Indeed, Edwina Kotoisiva from the Women's Crisis Centre observed that, "I think the biggest identity that we have in Fiji would racial. Everything has racial undertones from socialising – in school, when a woman is raped people want to know whether the woman is Fijian or Indian. So what has that got to with it? It's how people have been brought up" (Interview Kotoisiva, 21/12/05).

¹³ As a result, in this study I use the local terminology of 'race' rather than 'ethnicity.'

register that defines who is Fijian (Ratuva, 2003; Prasad et al, 2003; Ewins, 1998). According to this system, Fijian-ness is only acknowledged as passing through the male line (a fact which contradicts the matrilineal systems recorded by the Land Commissions in Macuata and Bua; Office of the Secretariat, F/N 37/81). Thus, children can only be registered on the *Vola Ni Kawa Bula* if their father is Fijian, but not if their father comes from elsewhere, regardless of whether their mother is Fijian or not. This identity gives them access to land rights, and affirmative action policies which help Fijians gain scholarships in education and grants in preparing land for agriculture, and so on. Thus, those who cannot register because their fathers are not Fijian may suffer a considerable disadvantage (see focus groups Lautoka and Suva).

In addition, industry, commerce and government remain largely racially stratified. In the colonial era, government officials were British or Australian and the management and owners were often Australian; plantation workers were Indian; and gold miners and landowners were Fijian; and many of these divisions remain in place today. While tourism has since come to the forefront, many of the assets such as hotels and resorts and airlines are foreign-owned, as are banks and tax-free factories. By contrast, Fijian communities continue to own land and work in the civil service. Fijian men constitute 99% of the military, 75% of the police force, and 90% of the Permanent Secretaries. Fijian women constitute 75% of nurses (Prasad et al 2001:5) and they are hired to work on resorts as waitresses and cleaners. While there have been some attempts to move Fijians into investment, these attempts have not been very successful (e.g. Prasad et al 2001; Ratuva 2000). By contrast, where once Indian labour was used almost exclusively on the plantations, Indo-Fijians now invest and are involved in the local transport industry or in freehold property (Prasad et al 2001). This fundamental division of people between Fijians and 'Others' provokes questions about what special privileges an indigenous people who have retained their land and maintained political power should have in relation to other citizens. Such questions have emerged from the specific style of colonisation experienced in Fiji.

The form of colonisation was relatively unique in that, during a period of tribal warfare and settlers attempting to protect their landholdings, several Fijian chiefs came together to ask for British intervention (France, 1969; Norton, 1990). Prior to this, three confederacies (*matanitu*) had been prominent: Kubuna (Bau and its territories), Tovata (Taveuni and the Lau Groups), and Burebasaga (Rewa and its territories), and they remain important markers of Fijian identity to this day. The greatest rivalry was between Rewa, in southeastern Viti Levu, and the emerging power of Bau, based in the same area. Cakobau's regime was established in the 1860s in Bau to protect European landholdings and in response to fears that discontent between coastal and inland Fijians would lead to an all-out race war. Because of continuing trouble between Fijians, and the pressures of increasing European settlement, Cakobau and 12 other chiefs asked Britain to intercede, and signed the Deed of Cession in 1874 (France 1969; Norton 1990).

The first Governor, Sir Arthur Gordon, governed Fiji with a benevolent and idealistic paternalism. Concerned by the fact that between 25 and 40% of the Fijian population had died in an epidemic of measles (figures taken from Naidu 1980:3, and Norton 1990:21 respectively), and that the new

colony had to be economically viable with sufficient labour for the plantations, Gordon decided to import indentured labourers from India. This led to a division between ethnicities that still exists today: indigenous Fijians continue to be collective landowners entitled to 'native land' while the descendants of the Indian immigrants are able to own only some of the small percentage of freehold. Most of these descendants continue to farm sugar on land leased from the NLTB and the local Fijian owners.

While indigenous Fijians did not die out as feared by Gordon, they became proportionally smaller as the Indian population grew, so that in 1936 Fijians numbered nearly 98,000 people but were 49% of the population in comparison to Indians who were 43%. By 1946, Indians/Indo-Fijians had numerically overtaken the Fijian population with 46% of the population in contrast to 45% of Fijians (Tavola 1991:13). In 1966, while Indians comprised 50.5% of the population, Fijians were 42% (Norton 1990:179). Indians thus became perceived as a political threat.¹⁴

At independence in 1970, the Fijian government followed the Westminster system, with parliamentary politics dominated by two parties which had formed in the 1960s: the ruling Alliance Party, which represented Fijian interest but which originally also had an Indian component, and the National Federation Party, which was supported mainly by Indo-Fijians. The parties' ethnic division also reflected land holding patterns, with Fijians as the collective landowners and Indo-Fijians as the lessees (Prasad et al 2003; Norton 1990; Halapua 2003). New parties such as the Fijian Nationalist Party (an off-shoot of the Alliance Party) formed in the 1970s and 1980s. Later, the Fiji Labour Party emerged from the trade union movement (Norton 1990; Halapua 2003). Parliamentary seats were also divided according to race (Prasad et al 2001:4). Unlike the traditional Westminster system, the parliamentary structure has an extra advisory body called the Great Council of Chiefs (GCC) or Bose Levu Vakaturaga (BLV), which was established in 1875 by Governor Gordon to advise parliament on native custom (France 1969; Prasad et al 2001). At independence, the Great Council of Chiefs became allied with the Alliance Party (Halapua 2003), and came to play a more influential role after the coups in 1987 (Ewins, 1998).

During the 1970s and 1980s, race became a regular political theme, especially around elections. For example, Butadroka, the popular head of the Fijian Nationalist Party from Rewa, was embittered by the failure of his bus company in competition with other Indo-Fijian bus companies. As a result, he readily incited landowners to intimidate Indo-Fijians, protested against perceived Indo-Fijian privilege. He then proposed in parliament that the British should pay for the Indians to be 'repatriated' to India (Norton 1990:114), and was later gaoled after the 1977 elections for comments "likely to incite violence" (cited in Norton, 1990:118). After the 1977 elections, the Prime Minister and a paramount chief of the Tovata confederacy, Ratu Mara, also used race to stop Indo-Fijian politicians challenging the government's proposal to bail the Native Land Trust Board out of debt. This, he said, was a "challenge to Fijian landed interests and [he] warned that 'blood will flow' if the Fijians' 'deep emotion feeling' for their land was not respected" (Norton, 1990:120). Race was also central to the 1982 elections when the Alliance party accused an Indo-Fijian party (the NFP) of being anti-Fijian while the NFP asked why Indo-Fijians were still being treated as foreigners (Norton, 1990).

In 1987, the Fiji Labour Party in coalition with the National Federation Party and led by Timoci Bavadra, the Fijian commoner from western Viti Levu, won the elections, arguing that chiefs needed to serve their people and that the National Lands Trust Board (NLTB) should be democratised in order to serve all Fijians rather than a privileged few (Norton, 1990; Lal, 1992). In contrast to his predecessors, Bavadra sought to reinforce the trade union movement, nationalise sectors of the economy, and implement progressive taxation (Prasad et al 2001:4). However, at the same time, a *Taukei* (Landowners) movement emerged from loyalists to the Tovata confederacy, with the claim that “the Fijians appear to have lost their country” (quoted in Norton 1990:137). Chiefs also believed that “the chiefs and their people are being ruled by *vulagi* [foreigners]” (quoted in Norton 1990:137).¹⁵ A week after the swearing-in of the government and protests outside parliament, Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka, third in command in the military and traditionally loyal to the Tovata confederacy, and 12 masked men staged the first coup (Norton 1990).

In the weeks that followed, Indo-Fijians and their homes were attacked and stoned by young Fijian men. Rabuka’s aim was “to establish Fijian political supremacy,” which he thought would restore order (Norton, 1990: 138). Addressing a Fijian crowd, he said, “The sooner we accept a new constitution the better, for we will be preserving what is dear to our hearts – the chiefly system, our land, and Christianity. All will be returned to normality once these are accepted” (cited in Norton, 1990: 139).

There was also intensifying debate about whether the 1970 constitution should be changed. The Constitutional Review Committee recommended that Fiji become a Christian State, there should be new provisions for affirmative action for Fijians, Fijians should be given complete ownership of all natural resources, each race had to vote communally with the most important offices of state reserved for *taukei*, and the Prime Minister should always be Fijian, echoing *taukeist* demands and serving to polarise debate further. As the local newspapers were being inundated with letters from *taukei* supporters, Suva became a site of arson and looting. Then 114 prisoners “broke out” from Naboro Prison to protest at the continuing instability and then returned peaceably to prison under military and police escort. In response to increasing chaos, Rabuka executed a second coup on September 25th, 1987, revoking the 1970 Constitution and making Fiji a republic. Indo-Fijian mobility was curtailed, senior civil servants who had not supported the coup were demoted or transferred, and the Sunday Observance Decree was issued (Lal, 1992; see religion section for more information).

Aiming to ensure Fijian paramountcy, the non-elected interim government introduced changes to the constitution in 1990, which included a number of affirmative action programs for Fijians (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005). The composition of the Lower House was changed so that 37 of the 70 seats were now reserved for indigenous Fijians (Prasad et al 2001:5). Voting became strictly communal, where each race could only vote for its own community. Rabuka also gave the Council of Chiefs much greater authority, where the Council of Chiefs now nominated 24 out of 34 senators and the President of Fiji and retained veto power for all legislation (Ewins, 1998). A new more

¹⁵ Some also argue that these chiefs were the same chiefs who had resisted Cakobau and subsequent colonial rule at Cession (ECREA, 2005).

broad-based democratic constitution was drawn up and passed in 1997, but three years later *taukei* demonstrated for its removal (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005).

The year, 2000, was also the year of a third coup when George Speight aimed to oust the first elected Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, Mahendra Chaudhry. While the coup appears to be a straightforward attempt to secure Fijian paramountcy, rumours that Indo-Fijian business interests financed the coup suggest that the reasons for the coup were multifaceted (Field et al 2003; MacWilliam 2002). The Chaudhry government had also made several decisions that particularly upset conservative Fijians, who responded by organising street demonstrations, including one on May 19th. At the same time, Speight led a small group in plain clothes into parliament and took government members hostage (Field et al 2005; Tarte 2001). Rioting, looting and arson ensued to an extent not seen before in Fiji. At one point, Suva also suffered from extensive power cuts, because of the resentment of Naitisiri landowners towards the Monasavu hydroelectric dam project built on their land (Field et al 2005).

The coup shocked Fijians with the realisation that Fiji was not only divided by race but also by major political divisions between Fijians at the national level. This has been interpreted variously as Eastern chiefs versus Western chiefs (Field et al 2005), as regional rivalry between families of paramount chiefs (Field et al 2005; Ryle for the 1987 coups), as class warfare between newly bourgeois chiefs and commoners who had become critical of their new wealth (Halapua 2003), and as the military forces' perception of their role as being analogous to that of the warrior clan in traditional village society, who had the power to install and remove chiefs – or in this case, the Prime Minister (Halapua 2003). Further, although Speight's interests in 2000 sounded very similar to Rabuka's in 1987, the coups had significantly different outcomes. Perceived by many as not knowing what he was doing, Speight was so disorganised that it led to speculation that this was only the first stage of the coup – and that someone like Rabuka would lead the second, real, coup with the pretext of saving Fiji from the first coup leaders (Field et al 2005).

The coup was followed by a mutiny at the Queen Elizabeth Barracks in November 2000, in an attempt to kill the head of the military, Commodore Bainimarama. In the fighting that followed, thirty soldiers were wounded and eight soldiers were killed, some with evidence of torture - but Bainimarama escaped (Field et al 2005; Halapua 2003).

Rebels also sieged the barracks in Labasa in Vanua Levu. Outside of Labasa, Indo-Fijians were also forced out of their homes by rebels, who then took about 20 men as hostages (Pacific Media Watch, 2000; Pacifik Nius, 2000). Thus, while the coup was Suva-centred, it extended inland of Viti Levu to Naitasiri and as far north into as Labasa. Meanwhile, around Lautoka in the Western Division, massive numbers of leases were expiring, leaving Indo-Fijian tenant farmers with nowhere to go (see section on land).

After the coup, the interim government headed by Laisenia Qarase, introduced the *Blueprint for the Protection of Indigenous Fijian and Rotuman Rights and Interests and Their Development*, which

offered affirmative action schemes for Fijians (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005), and which did not mention religions other than Christianity (ECCREA, 2005). More recently, the government has also proposed the Reconciliation, Tolerance and Unity Bill, which has caused much agitation within the community. The most contentious element of this Bill is the amnesty clause, which decriminalises political acts and provides amnesty for the 90 people in prison on coup related offences, many of whom were involved in the mutinies in Suva and Labasa (Interview Prison Informant, 9/12/05).¹⁶

In all, race has been a central theme around which politics in Fiji has revolved. While Indo-Fijians have been repeatedly marginalised in politics, there is also contestation among Fijians. Within this contestation, are questions about what it means to be Fijian (through blood, kinship and rank), and which region one owes loyalty to. Further, these contestations for power have also been institutionalised in such a way that everyone in Fiji is subject to their effects. Thus, the politicisation of race and the more submerged theme of divided Fijian loyalties continue to exacerbate communal division, creating an environment for continuing social injustice.

Religion

In Fiji, religious affiliation tends to reflect race, and, thus, most Indo-Fijians are Hindus or Muslims and most indigenous Fijians are Christian. Where an estimated 58.1% of Fiji's total population are Christian, the Methodist Church remains the largest church with 36.3 % of the total population and 93% of its members are Fijian. For Fijians, Methodism remains a particular strong signifier of the indigenous relationship with land, community and chiefs, because Methodism entered Fiji with missionaries from the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society in 1835 (Thornley 1996).¹⁷ After the conversion of the high chief, Cakobau, Methodism (or *lotu* which glosses as 'religion' but refers to Methodism) became closely aligned with the indigenous political structure and the *vanua* (land and community), and therefore is now central to indigenous Fijian identity (Tuwere 2002).

However, religion in Fiji quickly became highly pluralistic. Catholic missionaries arrived in Fiji in 1844 and worked in areas where Methodists had little influence (Tavola 1991; Mangubhai & Mugler 2003). Later, Anglican and Presbyterian Churches were established for the white settlers. The Seventh-day Adventists also arrived in Fiji in the 1890s (Seventh-day Adventist, 2005). During the period of indentured labour (1879-1916), Indian immigrants also brought Hinduism, the Sikh religion, and Islam (Singh, n.d.). After 1900, Punjabi Sikhs and Gujaratis arrived, but as free migrants. Like the Punjabi Sikhs, the Gujarati community remained distinct, especially after 1920 when more Gujaratis brought their families from India therefore were more able to retain caste distinctions than the indentured labourers (Grieco 1998). A small proportion of Indian labourers and other immigrants were converted to Christianity, but most Indo-Fijians today practise non-Christian religions.

However, Methodism retained its influence on most Fijians and, representing the chiefly system, it continues to be a driving force in Fiji politics. As a result, in the 1987 coups, the leaders of the coups, the military, and some of the church leaders readily deployed Christian imagery in their

¹⁶ Another 40 or so have since been released (Interview Prison Informant, 9/12/05).

¹⁷ Tahitian missionaries brought the teachings of the London Missionary Society prior to this but were not immediately successful (Thornley, 1996).

rhetoric. Rabuka (himself a Methodist, commoner, and military man) promoted himself as Moses of the Chosen People, associated the chiefly system with the land and Christianity, and proclaimed Christianity as the official religion of Fiji (Ratuva 1999; Norton 1990). In this way, narratives about the lost tribes of Israel in the Old Testament were used to endorse the claims of the landowners, to portray chiefs as divinely ordained, and to claim that land was “God’s exclusive gift to indigenous Fijians” (Interfaith Search Fiji, 2005: 78).

A dominant faction of the Methodist Church was also directly involved in Rabuka’s government. If key meetings were held in the home of a Methodist minister (Field et al 2005:39) and the offices of the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC) (FCC; Ernst, 1994), Rabuka and the Taukei movement also had supporters in the Methodist Church, including the General Secretary, Rev Manasa Lasaro, who influenced the military to impose the Sunday Decree, which prohibited all work on Sundays. When the interim government lessened the impact of the Decree by reinstating Sunday bus and taxi services at the end of 1988, protestors set up roadblocks at 70 places throughout Suva. This caused the Methodist Church to split with the ousting of the church’s President, Rev Josateki Koroi, who was critical of the coups, in favour of Rev Isireli Caucau (Halapua 2003; Ryle 2001; Ratuva 1999; Ernst 1994).¹⁸

If the Methodist Church was heavily implicated in the 1987 coups, Christian churches were involved in the aftermath of the coup in 2000 in the attempt to alleviate the damage of the coups and to reconcile different parties. While the Roman Catholic Church was involved in reconciliation meetings between indigenous Fijians and Indo-Fijians around the nation, a group of Protestant churches led by the Methodist Church began conducting reconciliation meetings to heal the rifts between Fijians. In Suva, 14 of these churches met and formed the Assembly of Christian Churches in Fiji (ACCF). Although the Methodist Church instigated this development, it is still the only mainline church in the organisation, which is, by and large, Pentecostal in nature.

The ACCF competes directly with the FCC which was founded in 1964 by the Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian and Samoan Congregational Churches. Later, the Roman Catholics, the Salvation Army and the Fiji Baptist Mission (known now as the Fiji Baptist Convention) also joined (Ernst 1994). As an affiliate of the World Council of Churches (WCC), the FCC works from a constitution aimed at unifying Christians, fostering understanding with other religious traditions, and encouraging activism in social justice issues. Its support for interfaith activities is a key element in the negative view of the FCC held by many of the Pentecostal churches. Although Muslims and Hindus in Fiji suggest that they “are worshipping the same God but doing it a different way,” most Pentecostal churches reject this, responding that Christians worship a different God and that Christ is the only way to him (Waqairatu cited in Newland, forthcoming). Because of this stance, almost none of the Pentecostal churches have ever joined FCC. In fact, this issue is a source of contention even within the FCC itself, as both the Methodists and the Salvation Army refuse to participate in any interfaith service with Muslims or Hindus.

By contrast, the ACCF was formed with the objective to unite the Christian population in Fiji and

¹⁸ While the Methodist Church is strongly associated with Fijian chiefly authority, one of its contradictions has been its Indian Division, which, in 1996, had nearly 5 500 members (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 1996). However, many Indo-Fijians left the Church after the 2000 coup, and up to 3000 migrated to form Methodist Indo-Fijian communities in Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Australia (Newland, forthcoming).

convert the non-Christian population to Christianity (ACCF Review 2001). Currently, its members are: the Apostles Gospel Outreach Fellowship International (AGOFI); Assemblies of God, Fiji (AOG); Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF); Christian Outreach Centre (COC); Church of God of Fiji (COG); Covenant Evangelical Church (CEC); Grace Baptist Church; Advanced Breakthrough Ministry (ABC); Jesus Power Church; the Methodist Church in Fiji and Rotuma; the Methodist Davuilevu Theological College; New Life Centre; Pentecostal Churches of Fiji; Rescue Mission Fellowship; the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG), the Worldwide Church of God in Fiji and Tonga; the Fiji Brethren Assemblies Partnership (Gospel Churches); the Family Life Ministry; the New Methodist Church; Fiji Baptist Convention; the Prison Chaplancy; Impact World Tour/YWAM; Prison Fellowship; Global Sports Ministries; Summit Ministries (World Views); Teach us to Pray (ministry); and Assemble Communication (ACCF: 2005).

While the FCC advised the government in restricting the entry of new churches to Fiji before 1987, the ACCF has a much wider advisory capacity. Because the ACCF has the President's patronage and, by its own admission, maintains close links with the Prime Minister (Ernst 2003) and the Ministry of Reconciliation (Interview Kanaimawi, 2005b; Ministry of Reconciliation, 2002), it has come to be perceived as a political organisation and Think Tank for the Prime Minister. This signals a major shift in the relationship between Christian churches and the state. When critics question this relationship, representatives of the ACCF justify it as furthering the project of reconciliation and healing between Fijians (Newland, forthcoming).

Almost all of the member churches of the ACCF (with the notable exception of the Methodist Church) have roots in the Pentecostal/evangelical tradition. If the Assistant General Secretary of the Methodist Church, Reverend Waqairatu, emphasises individuals helping themselves, the Pentecostal/evangelical churches also tend to be individualistic in orientation, emphasising the need for a correct relationship with God through a highly emotional personal experience. As a result, social justice is not a concept that rates highly for most of these churches (see Theologies and Philosophies of Social Justice).

Moreover, the majority of these churches (including the Methodist Church) also promote notions of a hierarchical nuclear family, where the husband is the head of the household, the wife supports the father, and the children strictly obey the parents (Newland, forthcoming). Therefore, these churches do not accept women's equality, nor the idea that children have rights independent from their parents. In addition, because the churches view the hierarchical nuclear family as the basis for a moral Christian society, alternative sexualities and lifestyles are considered as based on a personal choice to lead an immoral life, which therefore undermines the moral order. This, in part, explains the Methodist Church's decision to march against homosexuality in 2005, and the support this gained from churches such as Assemblies of God (see section on family and sexuality below). Lastly, the fact that Methodism is intrinsic to the chiefly system and the *vanua* (Fijian land and community), and the fact that the Methodist Church and ACCF to which it belongs both aspire to give Fijians paramouncy in politics and in land has inhibited the prospects of equitable solutions to the social justice issues that have emerged around land rental monies and expiring leases.

Land

For Methodist Fijians, land or *vanua* is the first pillar of three in Fijian identity (the other two are: *lotu* or Methodism; and *matanitu* or chiefly system/government; see previous sections). The concept of *vanua* not only refers to land but the people who belong to the land, the means of livelihood, the sense of time provided by the agricultural calendar, and “the traditions and memories of ancestors” (Tuwere, 2002: 41). As land continues to inform Methodist Fijian identity and as relations around land were perhaps the most significant social justice issue that continually emerged in the focus groups, it is essential to understand the context in which contemporary land issues have emerged.

Because of decisions made in the colonial period, land is registered at the NLTB in the names of Fijian *mataqali* (a kinship unit descended from a common ancestor). In fact, neither the colonial land commissions nor the newly devised Council of Chiefs could find any common Fijian land tenure system. For instance, when Governor Gordon asked the Council of Chiefs to decide on a unit for registration of lands, all the chiefs agreed they knew the term *mataqali* denoted a descent group, but the extent of inclusion and exclusion varied, just as their ideas about land rights varied. As registration of land was deemed desirable, the chiefs finally decided that all Fijians should be registered in their *mataqali* and that it was unlawful for any *mataqali* to alienate its land (France, 1969).

In 1912, the newly appointed Head of Commission, G. V. Maxwell, outlined the model which has been in use ever since. In Maxwell’s model, the biggest unit is the *vanua*, which is constituted by *yavusa*, which are then subdivided into *mataqali* and further subdivided into *tokatoka*. The *yavusa* is defined as a kinship unit of brothers who shared descent from a single ancestor god. Despite all the contrary evidence recorded by previous land commissions, this model became orthodoxy (France 1969; Clammer 1975). If the colonial administration institutionalised and normalised this particular model, it has had resounding consequences in that the model has been accepted as the Fijian socio-political system throughout Fiji and in that Fijians’ relationship with land is now fixed within a set of boundaries.

In 1940, as a result of the Native Land Trust Ordinance, the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) was established to consolidate the work of the Land Commissions and to manage Native Land leases “in trust and for the benefit of native owners” (Office of the Secretariat, F37/253). Established at about the same time as many leases were coming up for expiry, the NLTB’s most publicised role was in its eviction of Indian tenant farmers without compensation for tenant improvements (Office of the Secretariat, F37/175).¹⁹ Thus, the NLTB began with controversy over lease expiries and has since had a somewhat troubled history, including a couple of major reorganisations, difficulties in collecting rental arrears and massive operating deficits (NLTB, 1969-2002; NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005).

¹⁹ Although the evictions resulting from the Native Land Ordinance were unpopular, only a small percentage of leases were not being renewed and the same document protected Indian tenants from the practice of paying bribes/unofficial fees to landowners before applying for renewal of leases (Office of the Secretariat, F37/177).

With regard to the division of land, the 1980 statistics record Fiji as comprised of:

Freehold Land	149,085 hectares	(8.17%)
Crown Land	172,606 hectares	(9.46%)
Native Land	1,503,662 hectares	(82.37%)
(NLTB 1980:18)		

However, much of the best agricultural land had been alienated as freehold early in colonial history (Ewins, 1998). In the 1990s, the percentage of native land further increased when 18 100 of Crown leases reverted to native land, 8 145 of which were agricultural leases (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005: 102). By 2002, 87% of the land was categorised as native land (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005; Halapua 2003).

Many Fijian landowners are showing discontent with the way the rents are distributed. The NLTB deducts up to 25% of all income from the rent, premium, and fees it collects, based on notional costs of: 10% for secretarial services and conveyancing, 9% for land administration, and 6% for accounting, collection and distribution of proceeds (NLTB, 1974:18). The other 75% is divided between heads of proprietary units. According to Ewins, 5% is awarded to the head of the *vanua*, “10% to the head of the *yavusa*, 15% to the head of the *mataqali*, and 45% to the members of the *mataqali*” (Ewins, 1998: 160). Sometimes, particular individuals hold the position of head of several levels at once, thus acquiring significant wealth. A journalist explained to Ewins that:

[Suppose the chief is] the head of the yavusa. In most cases... he is also head of one mataqali and of one tokatoka. So he gets a share [as] the head of the yavusa... And then the same chief will get his cut as the head of the mataqali... as the head of the tokatoka, and... as [an ordinary member]. ...By the time he's taken all his shares there's only about 45% left for the other people. There's a chief just down here in Lami [near Suva], Tui Lami, [who personally] gets \$110,000 a year in his pocket (Journalist quoted in Ewins, 1998: 160).

While this means that some chiefs have access to substantial funds, landowners are increasingly finding that they cannot live on the rent that is distributed to them (see Lautoka land owners focus group, 9/11/05).

In addition, land legislation has created controversy for Indo-Fijian tenant farmers. Just before independence, the Agricultural Landlord and Tenancy Ordinance (ALTO) was passed, guaranteeing 30 year leases of Fijian land to Indo-Fijian tenants with the provision of renewal every 10 years if both parties consented, but, in 1976, it was replaced with the Agricultural Landlord and Tenants Act (ALTA), which the NLTB argued had no provisions for renewal of leases (NLTB, 1980, 1998, 1999). Faced with widespread lease expiries due to begin in 1980, a provision was inserted into ALTA for a 20 year extension (NLTB, 1980).

Thus, native leases under ALTA began expiring in 1997. While others have argued that the leases could be renewed for 30 years under the conditions of ALTA if the NLTB had the will to do so, an inquiry showed that 80% of landowners wanted their land back for themselves and their children because they felt the NLTB and ALTA had lost control (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005). However, little has been done to help relocate evicted farmers. In 1999, only 537 hectares of State and freehold land had been granted, offering 132 lots of 2 to 11 hectares (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005: 104). After the election of a Labour Coalition government into power in 1999, \$28 000 was offered to outgoing farmers at the expiry of their leases in the form of preparation of land and the first crop and equipment. New farmers who leased vacated properties would receive \$10 000. This was further reduced to \$10 000 for both outgoing and incoming farmers with the third coup in 2000 (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005: 106).

Expiring ALTA Leases

Expiry Year	No. of Leases	Expiry Year	No. of Leases	Expiry Year	No. of Leases
1997	134	2008	299	2018	306
1998	237	2009	278	2019	152
1999	1594	2010	374	2020	168
2000	1955	2011	445	2021	135
2001	458	2012	419	2022	148
2002	622	2013	487	2023	88
2003	432	2014	380	2024	85
2004	600	2015	784	2025	65
2005	463	2015	361	2026	54
2006	521	2016	177	2027	13
2007	652	2017	254	2028	
Total	Expiring	Leases	13140		

(Source: NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005: 104.)

There is evidence that such massive transformation of the rural areas has resulted in deep distress in the Indo-Fijian community, where the suicide rate is many times that of Fijians or others (see table below). Notably, where the overall suicide rate hovered between 75 and 84 from 1993 – 1996, in 1997, the year leases began to expire, the number peaked at 106 before declining again with 94 suicides in 1998 and 88 suicides in 1999. In 2000, the number reached 104 suicides and 114 suicides in 2001. Most suicides and attempted suicides occur in the West and Northern Divisions: the sugar cane belt in which Indo-Fijians were dealing with lease expiries (NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005: 115-6).

Suicide and Attempted Suicide Cases by Race for 1999/2000

Race	1999			2000		
	Suicide	Attempted Suicide	Total	Suicide	Attempted Suicide	Total
Fijian	10	7	17	12	5	17
Indian	75 (85%)	84 (92%)	59 (88.82%)	92 (88%)	111 (93%)	203 (91%)
Others	3	0	3	0	3	3
Total	88	91	179	104	119	223

(Source: NGO Coalition of Human Rights, 2005:115)

With the largest mill in Fiji, the region around Lautoka comprises of 45% of the 29000 leases managed by the NLTB, thus generating 58% of the NLTB's gross rental income. In the year, 2000, 1900 ALTA leases expired, with 74% (1400) of these located around Lautoka in the Western Division. Another 916 ALTA leases had expired the year before, with the grace period ending in 2000 (NLTB, 2000:13).

In Vanua Levu, the biggest urban area is Labasa. Indians constitute over half the population in town and about 82% of the peri-urban area (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2003; Bhindi, n.d.). The province was hit by Cyclone Ami on January 14th, 2003, and while government assistance was promised, locals alleged that the survey team came but did not meet all the affected residents. As a result, many of these people are still in need two years later (Interview Raj, 26/10/05). Since these figures were recorded, the vast majority of leases around Labasa have expired, thus resulting in a mass displacement of Indo-Fijian tenant cane-farmers.

Clearly, the distribution of lease monies through the NLTB is affecting both the Fijian landowners and Indo-Fijian tenant farmers. Moreover, the decision to allow leases to lapse without renewal is creating widespread change in the areas dependent on sugar farming, with an alarming impact on Indo-Fijian wellbeing, which was also reflected in the focus groups (see e.g. Labasa focus groups).

Education

The results from the focus groups (see next section) show that education has become a major challenge because of two major issues: the cost is prohibitive for many of the poorer families and affirmative action policies exclude Indo-Fijian children. In addition, current student career aspirations are unrealistic, and the quality of education is highly variable, with Fijian schools tending to be of inferior quality to other schools.

Schools managed by churches and religious organisations have played an important role in education in Fiji since colonisation. In the first 30 years after 1874, only the children of settlers in Levuka and Suva had access to government schools, but due to the work of the Methodist missions, schools had been set up in most villages in Fiji and most children could read in the vernacular. Although Anglicans, the Arya Samaj and Muslims also established schools for the Indians by 1916, Indians were seen by the colonial administration as an unskilled labour force, which should be kept undereducated. Fijians

are likely to fall back on work in garment factories (*Fiji Times*, 11/12/05) or work in the informal sector as housekeepers.

Youth are also most vulnerable to being infected by HIV/AIDS. While the first case was reported in 1989, there are now 200 locals known to be infected and 50% of these are under 25 (*Fiji Times*, 2/12/05). The current position of most churches on issues such as HIV/AIDS is to teach abstinence (Newland, forthcoming), but this seems to have little effect on youth sexuality (see Labasa youth focus group, 26/10/05).

Alternative sexualities have surfaced as an issue for public controversy. The Methodist Church held a protest march to unite against homosexuality following a court case on homosexual acts in April 2005. Reverend Waqairatu, Assistant General Secretary of the Methodist Church, is reported to have said that homosexuality could only be eradicated if everyone was converted to Christianity or other religions (*Fiji Times*, 3/9/2005).

Thus, a number of social issues are emerging in the domestic sphere. Women face high rates of domestic violence in their marriages, partly due to their subordinate status in relation to their husbands. However, this appears to have been exacerbated by social and economic pressures such as lease expiries. Youth are faced with the prospect of unemployment and low-paid work and are vulnerable to infection from HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the marches against homosexuality have marginalised the gay community and have had the affect of endorsing violence against gays and lesbians.

Methodology

Fieldwork

Much of the research for this project was organised by Vitolia Mo'a and Paulo Rabakewa from the Faith and Society Program in ECREA, who convened Think Tanks and focus groups in Suva, Labasa and Lautoka. Through their contacts, Christian leaders from a number of denominations were invited to participate in four Think Tanks in Suva from July to August, 2005. Although the Think Tanks provided fertile ground for the research, many of the denominations asked, and particularly those involved with the ACCF did not attend. Because this meant that only the Anglican and Catholic churches were represented and because this meant that indigenous Fijians remained underrepresented, Vitolia, Paulo and I attended an ACCF meeting to discuss our project. From this introduction, I was later able to interview Reverend Sani on tape.

In addition, one of the participants at the Think Tanks also arranged a meeting through Interfaith Search on 18th September, 2005, where leaders from the Muslim, Hindu, Christian, and Bahai faiths were asked to present papers on Social Justice.

After these sessions, ECREA organised a workshop on sustained dialogue at the Pacific Theological

College from September 19th to September 22nd, 2005. David Robinson took a group of religious leaders and representatives through a sustained dialogue processes with the aim of training local leaders in order to promote future dialogues about Social Justice in the Pacific. The main issues used as examples during the workshop were: the political crisis in Tonga, homosexuality, and the squatter problem in Suva. While the process is discussed in more detail in the handbook, it was interesting that many of the key themes of this study appeared at the workshop, such as how culture and processes such as sustained dialogue which allow groups who are usually marginal to cultural processes to speak; what culture is and the fact that it changes; and whether human rights and culture are antithetical (see Analysis).

The workshop was followed by six focus groups in Labasa (October, 2005), five focus groups in Lautoka (November, 2005), and three focus groups in Suva (November and December, 2005). Focus groups were organised by local leaders involved with the churches with the intention of gathering the views of a cross-section of the population. Because of the diversity of people invited, these focus groups enabled us to attain a picture of some of the main social issues in these centres very quickly. In Labasa, the focus groups were organised according to the following categories: the elderly, women, displaced farmers, youth, leaders from different religious groups, and squatters. The most popular focus group was in the squatter camp, apparently because it was so unusual for people to visit let alone take an interest in their opinions. However, the squatters came and went according to their willingness to contribute and their obligations to waking babies. In retrospect, a notable absence in this data was the voice of landowners, although one landowner was present in the focus group for youth. After the focus group with displaced farmers, I also held an impromptu interview on tape with one of the participants who is a councillor and who therefore has not had the same experiences as the rest of the focus group.

While the Labasa participants were strikingly open in the focus groups, the focus groups in Lautoka proved to be more of a challenge to set up and some also were more difficult provoke into dialogue. Here, the focus groups were arranged on the themes of: the HART home tenants, the tenants living in Koro-i-pita, Catholics and Fijian landowners. The first two focus groups were of interest because these tenants have come from a background of poverty and been resettled into villages that were built for them by the Catholic Church and Rotary International respectively. These focus groups sketched a portrait of urban poverty, aggravated by the near-collapse of the garment industry in this region. However, while conducting the focus group for HART home tenants, police entered and observed most of the session, apparently waiting to interview some of the informants, which may have subdued some of the responses in the focus group. In the third focus group, the Fijian landowners expanded our data to include rural problems with land that also beset the region around Lautoka. The fourth focus group was intended to be an interfaith dialogue, but those who attended were all Catholic but from very different sections of the Catholic church, e.g. the charismatics, the Indo-Fijian section, and the Fijian section. A fifth focus group was also held with members of the ecumenical organisation, Sai Baba, during one of their meetings, which gave some indication of the important aspects of social justice that needed to be dealt with according to the views of professional Indo-Fijians.

In Suva, focus groups were organised for: the women community leaders' group, the squatters in Jittu Estate, and the gay and lesbians, the latter to give contrasting views to the Methodist Church's public stance against homosexuality. The two gay men and lesbian who participated all worked for the Sexual Minorities Project. A fourth focus group for the representatives of non-government organisations was arranged but did not eventuate.

Focus Groups by Gender and Ethnicity

Focus Group	Male	Female	Fijian	Indian	Other	Total
Lb1 - Over 50s	2	3	2	2	1	5
Lb2 – Women	0	6	2	3	1	6
Lb3 - Displaced Farmers	3	3	0	6	0	6
Lb4 – Youth	6	4	5	5	0	10
Lb5 - Multi-faith	5	1	2	1	3	6
Lb6 – Squatters	2	15	6	10	1	17
La1 - HART home tenants	2	18	5	14	1	20
La2 – Koro-i-pita tenants	2	6	2	6	0	8
La3 – Catholics	2	7	5	2	3	9
La4 - Fijian Landowners	2	4	6	0	0	6
La5 - Sai Baba	8	5	0	13	0	13
S1 – Women Community Leaders	0	5	3	0	2	5
S2 - Jittu Estate	1	3	4	0	0	4
S3 - Gay and Lesbians	2	1	2	0	1	3
Totals	37	81	44	62	13	118

Women are over-represented in the data for two reasons. Firstly, all but the Sai Baba focus group were held during the day, while men were often at work. Nonetheless, men outnumbered women in the youth and multi-faith focus groups in Labasa, the Sai Baba group in Lautoka, and the gay and lesbian group in Suva, and an equal number of men and women participated in the focus group for displaced farmers in Labasa. Secondly, women were sought out because their voices are usually unrepresented, particularly in the women's group in Labasa and the Women Community Leaders' Group in Suva. They vastly outnumbered men in the squatter group in Labasa and the group for HART home tenants in Lautoka and significantly outnumbered men in the Koro-i-pita and Catholic focus groups. In this way, this study is relatively unique because, while men's voices are definitely heard in this study, it is not at the expense of women.

Indo-Fijians are slightly over-represented in the data, comprising of 52% of the sample, while constituting only 44% of the total population according to the 1996 Census. The category of 'Others' is also slightly over-represented at 11% of the sample while only 5% of the total population. This means Fijians are under-represented at 37% of the sample, although constituting 51% of the total population. I have tried to off-set this bias by interviewing Reverend Sani, the Coordinator of the ACCF.

Focus Groups by Religious Affiliation

Focus Group	Catholic	Methodist	Other Ch.	Hindu	Muslim	No Church*	Total
Lb1 - Over 50s	3	1	0	1	0	0	5
Lb2 – Women	3	2	1	0	0	0	6
Lb3 – Displaced Farmers	2	0	0	4	0	0	6
Lb4 – Youth	7	1	0	1	1	0	10
Lb5 - Multi-faith	0	3	3	0	0	0	6
Lb6 – Squatters	1	3	3	8	2	0	17
La1 – HART home tenants	3	4	8	2	5	1	20
La2 – Koro-i-pita tenants	1	0	6	0	1	0	8
La3 – Catholics	9	0	0	0	0	0	9
La4 - Fijian Landowners	6	0	0	0	0	0	6
La5 - Sai Baba	0	0	0	13	0	0	13
S1 – Women Community Leaders	4	0	1	0	0	0	5
S2 - Jittu Estate	3	1	0	0	0	0	4
S3 - Gay and Lesbians	0	0	0	0	0	3	3
Totals**	43	14	22	29	9	4	118

* 'No Church' can refer to atheism or lack of institutional affiliation.

** Some participants identified themselves as Hindu and Christian.

Catholics make up nearly one-third of the participants of focus groups, reflecting the contacts of one of the organisers and their readiness to participate in such a study. Given that Methodism is the major Christian religion in Suva, Methodists are underrepresented in this study (under 12% when they are 36.3% of the population) and interestingly those who participated did not always agree with the public comments made by Methodist representatives in Suva. While many more Methodists were invited, they did not attend. Other Christians include the Seventh-day Adventists, the Latter-day Saints of Jesus Christ, the Assemblies of God, Emmanuel Full Gospel Church, the New Cabinet Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and Christian Mission Fellowship.

While Hindus make up only a quarter of the participants, their concerns are well-represented with regard to issues about leases in Labasa and urban poverty in Lautoka. Muslims number roughly one in thirteen or just over 7% of people in this study thus matching the proportion of the population (Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 1996). However, they were not represented in the Labasa focus groups because these were held during Ramadan, although leaders were explicitly invited to the multi-faith focus group. Islam is a growing religion in Labasa, and there are at least two mosques in town, apparently headed by imams from Pakistan, which makes these groups important for future studies.

Lastly, the four who stated they belonged to no church did not regard themselves as atheists but rather felt alienated from church institutions. Instead, one of the HART home tenants explained that they prayed in their own house, and the three in the gay and lesbian focus group counted themselves as coming from strongly religious backgrounds (Catholic, Methodist, and Latter-day Saints) but who had rejected institutional religion for a more spiritual kind.

After the focus groups, I also held interviews which deepened the debate on many of the issues that emerged during this research. Those interviewed were: Reverend Sani (ACCF coordinator), an anonymous source on the prisons, Samima Ali and Edwina Kotoisuva at the Women's Crisis Centre, and Rameesh Deo Raj, a cane farmer who held additional views to those presented in the displaced farmers focus group. I also attempted to interview Reverend Waqairatu (Assistant General Secretary of the Methodist Church and new Chairman of the ACCF) on many occasions, but he was too busy to see me. The interview with Reverend Sani is treated at some length as he agreed to talk to me as the representative of the ACCF and it appears after the thinktanks in order to widen the scope of debate between the churches in Suva. The other interviews have been incorporated throughout the report.

Structure of the Focus Groups

In his peace research, Steve Ratuva created the Participatory Collective Appraisal method, which asks focus groups to come to a consensus on each issue asked for them (Ratuva, 2002). While this method may give participants skills in enabling collective decision-making and therefore provide skills need for reconciliation work in the future, the needs of a study in social justice required a different approach. Because I felt that asking participants to arrive at a consensus would only result in a narrow range of ideas on a topic that is potentially wide-ranging, I created a method to try and harness as many different views as possible within certain contexts.

The focus groups were therefore conducted informally, with the intention of gaining people's trust and confidence. I dressed casually, and in most cases, sat on the floor and noted down people's comments on a large piece of butcher's paper with the intention of making the environment personal and unthreatening. I asked each question to each person in the circle around me and sometimes asked questions in ways that contradicted my own beliefs in order to receive as many different responses as possible. They could speak out of order but I also made a point of asking everyone and repeatedly asking for a range of opinions to avoid one dominating view. I used butchers paper as a kind of moveable blackboard, which then had the added benefit of keeping a permanent record. This approach had another benefit: in that members of the focus group were focused on the act of writing. Even when they were illiterate, they could see their voices transcribed on to a big section of the paper, which had an affirming effect for themselves and which focused the entire group on to the paper.

The communicating language was English, which was usually the most neutral language as focus groups were often multi-racial, but there were those who did not speak it, did not have a good grasp of it, or were shy in using it. Because of the potential language problem, I often asked the same question

in numerous different ways, to give people a chance to find words that they could respond to. At the squatters' camp, the women switched constantly between Hindi, Fijian, and broken English and were translating comments across up to three languages. Paulo was able to translate some Fijian although had difficulty with the Labasa dialect and some Hindi.

As a result, the quotes used in writing up the fieldwork results are those I wrote on butchers paper, rather than being reflective of taped quotes. They are therefore sometimes clearer than word-for-word quotes and were also sometimes composite responses from several questions put to the participant concerned. While many participants were very articulate, other answers came through several people (especially when translated as in the case of some of the responses of the squatters in Labasa), and so reflect a collective understanding of both my questions and the individual's answers.

As I addressed every participant, I asked further questions for clarifications and to explore individual stories. For some sessions, this set of questions was experienced as consciousness-raising and some ended with participants experiencing joy or inspiration for further activities in this area. However, because the groups had very different levels of education and exposure to notions of 'Social Justice' and social issues, I tailored my questions accordingly. For example, because nearly all of the squatters in Labasa were unfamiliar with the term 'Social Justice' and often gave highly personalised responses to the questions,²¹ I asked for succinct versions of life stories (Behar, 1990; Cole, 1991), which provided insight as to the length of time they had been squatters and the kinds of conditions which led them into this lifestyle. Such information informs other aspects of this project such as the way that churches are currently involved with such communities and how they might be better mobilised. Certainly, the results indicate that there is a need for churches to engage in further consciousness-raising in such communities.

Two to three focus groups were scheduled every day and it took at least two hours to conduct every focus group. This seemed to be about the maximum time I could sustain effective attention, especially among the lower-income groups who needed help with interpreters. Because the focus groups in Suva were much smaller, I had time to add specific questions about identities and the way these related with democracy.

Lastly, I made a guarantee to all those who participated in the Think Tanks and the focus groups that their names would be withheld in order to allow discussion to flow freely. However, of those I interviewed, only one asked for his name to be withheld (the Prison Informant), thus all other interviews are referenced accordingly. All focus groups were taped and transcribed.

²¹ As the focus group style required people's attention away from their other activities and as we were not paying participants, I could not hold further workshops for those who were unfamiliar with the concept of social justice, but instead concentrated on defining the issues as such communities saw them.

Results from Fieldwork

Think Tanks at ECREA and Interview with the ACCF Coordinator

The Think Tanks held at ECREA from July to August, 2005 were based along four major themes: theologies of social justice; social justice and the churches; the politics of land; and issues and suggested guidelines for the handbook. Reflective of the fact that social justice can be attributed to many issues, the issues discussed ranged widely. These addressed the following broad categories: theological differences and alternative philosophies, why certain issues are tackled more effectively by secular organisations, the hierarchy of the churches and their relationship to cultural practices, practical issues at the grassroots level, the relationship between church and state, and possible approaches to solutions (see handbook).

In theological terms, it was recognised that different churches had different approaches to social justice. In the first instance, the participants noted that for many churches social justice was a lower priority than righteousness, holiness, the relationship with God and church maintenance (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05). Churches belonging to the Pentecostal/ evangelical movement such as the Christian Mission Fellowship and Assemblies of God were less likely to be involved in issues of social justice, both because of an emphasis on evangelism and because it was believed that, once the individual's relationship with God was corrected, then everything else would fall into place (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

Secondly, the different theologies arising from Christian churches in Fiji had differing ideas about the relative importance of the Old and New Testament, which appears specifically in relation to land issues. Indeed, it was noted that the theology of land can be drawn from the Old Testament, but the New Testament spiritualises the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ himself was not a landowner but was always on the move (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

Because the participants in the Think Tanks were mostly Catholic and Anglican,²² most discussed the notion of social justice in terms of God being a loving God. In this view, the human community is evolving towards a community of love, as put on the right path by Jesus Christ, and therefore everybody should be respected as equals. As human beings were created in the image of God, to be fully Christian is to be fully human. ACCF member churches operate more out of the Old Testament and are more fundamentalist in their reading and translation of the scriptures – hence the differences in perspectives and approaches.

It was pointed out that the question of who God is and what image of God is held is vital to how justice is seen. Referring to the arguments of Latin American Liberation Theology, one participant argued that the image of God as hierarchical justifies the maintenance of present systems. Discussion also touched on whether Jesus Christ was seen as just in his own time. The point was made that the

Pharisees did not see him this way because of their image of the correctness of God (Think Tank 1: 18/7/05). Broadly, then, there are two traditions: where God is seen as loving and inclusive as suggested by Christ's teachings or as the law-giving hierarchical God. When God is viewed as loving and inclusive, social justice can then be viewed as an essential part of the purpose of creation (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

Although the dominant image at the Think Tanks was that God is a loving God, one participant noted that:

Preaching Good News is the mission of the Church. You can preach to homeless kids that 'God loves you' but they have no food, no home. What kind of justice is that? God saves you but these people haven't experienced that. Do we believe it or are we just mouthing it? I have doubts about this Good News. It's not Yahweh of Genesis and everything comes to be. To say but not do makes us all liars (Think Tank 1: 18/7/05).

Lastly, there were also problems of translations of concepts from English into Fijian. For instance, the notion of the holy is translated into *tabu* in Fijian, where *tabu* means a prohibition on touching because of the inherent awe (Think Tank 1: 18/7/05), and it tends to be associated with chiefly power. This will impact on the resulting theology.

Another question that emerged in the Think Tanks was why secular organisations seemed to be more successful in promoting social justice than many of the church programs. For example, atheists established Bayly Welfare and the Women's Crisis Centre, but it was argued that this may be an advantage in a multi-religious society (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05). Secular society challenges the churches when it proposes ideas such as Human Rights, which many Christians in Fiji see as foreign (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

Whether such programs are initiated by secular society or by the churches, the remedies tend to be the same: hand-outs and education. While charity can be seen as an important dimension of the social work of churches, it often became the only dimension, thus ignoring the oppressive structures that continue to exacerbate poverty and other social injustices. It was thought that people needed to be empowered at the bottom, which can then transform the existing hierarchies (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

Such insights directed the Think Tank participants towards the problems created by church hierarchies in relation to the church communities they serve. Because structures were resistant to change (Think Tanks 3 & 4: 29/8/05, 12/9/05) and leaders become focused on status, power, and making their own lives comfortable, only small groups of Christians can lead to change through empowering the grassroots. On top of this, Biblical teaching in Fiji is very patriarchal (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05). One participant noted the frustrations that were endured by groups such as the women's organisation, WEAVERS, which encouraged women's inclusion in the church. With regard to women, some churches feel threatened, believing that women who talk in public will rebel against church policies. Conservative women may also inhibit other women's attempts to change such structures. As more

than sixty women have studied theology but have largely remained invisible, WEAVERS is in the process of collecting their stories. For example, in one case, a woman was told to resign and in another, she was moved to the outer provinces (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05). More broadly, there seems to be a breakdown between the theological colleges and what can be taught in the home parish, whether in Tonga, Samoa, or Fiji. When newly trained theologians return to their home parishes with views that contradict local ideas, they are sent to isolated or distant parishes (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

Since the 1987 coups in Fiji, the Methodist Church has been prominent in the public forum. It was noted that both Rabuka, leader of the 1987 coups, and Qarase, the current leader, are both Methodists and therefore the silence may be attributed to fear. Although Archbishop Mataka speaks out from time to time on behalf of the Roman Catholic Church, his is a lone voice. Other church representatives feel they cannot speak up because they are numerically much smaller. Silence is also a reflection of immigration politics, where individuals have been expelled for publicly dissenting (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05). Silence was acknowledged to be part of the Fijian cultural tradition but it was in the chiefs' interests to promote it. The Fiji school system further promotes and maintains silence because it tends to feed information to its students rather than train them in analysis. Educated people get caught between their cultural identity and speaking out (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

In all, it was thought that individuals have to move beyond the teachings of their churches and learn to think for themselves. This means rejecting structures that resist the ordination of women and also structures that lead to the lack of consultation regarding the appointments at senior levels (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

Practical issues that were addressed in the Think Tank sessions included: poverty and squatters, health, women, empowerment through education and micro-businesses, and land and leases. Firstly, in the Catholic Church, social justice is normally thought of in economic terms and poverty (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05; see Introduction). If social justice needs to be acquired with education, squatters may not be familiar with the term. In addition, they are simply surviving from day-to-day and live with the reality of the inequity created by social structures, but may not be able to articulate these conditions. Sometimes it took outsiders to initiate change. Participants tended to agree that the churches' main emphasis has been on hand-outs rather than on enabling people to deal with structures (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

With regards to the squatter situation in Suva, a central issue is that, if the policy is to relocate squatters, land must be available for them to relocate to. While the Methodist Church has opened up land in Davuilevu, other squatters have nowhere to go. The danger of clearing squatters is that it might become like the situation in Zimbabwe, where squatter settlements have been bulldozed, and squatter families are left vulnerable to persecution. Yet, if people are left to act as they wish, the result is chaotic, and therefore the government does have an obligation to deal with the squatter problem and needs to plan it properly. One innovative suggestion was that surrounding landowners might be persuaded to supply food (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

With regard to other kinds of assistance to the poor, establishments like Bayly Welfare hand out food alleviating immediate needs, but such efforts do not solve the problem of entrenched poverty, with the result that children cannot go to school from one generation to the next. Therefore, it is important to fund education programs, which should enable children access to better life opportunities. Another challenge is that handicapped children in poor families have no access to aftercare (Think Tank 2: 1/8/05).

Many of the participants discussed the importance of enabling empowerment throughout the Think Tanks. Empowerment was used in terms of giving control to people over their lives through the creation of small business such as selling chilli, which would enable people to move out of helplessness (Think Tank 1: 18/7/05). Churches should therefore encourage micromanagement of small businesses. At present, women run the most successful small businesses in rural areas. However, women's church-based organisations could do more to enhance women's abilities and opportunities, as women at village level are still only relied upon to produce and sell food and domestic products for the bazaar, according to their traditional gender roles (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

A major issue brought up in the Think Tanks was Fijian landownership. While the idea that Indo-Fijians were going to take the land fuelled the coups everyone had accepted the fact that Fijians own most of the land in Fiji, but other ethnicities wanted secure leases. While Hindu Indo-Fijians were often told that they did not understand the *vanua* (land and its associations with community for Fijians), the fact that Hindus also had a concept of mother earth where land was not viewed simply as a commodity often went unacknowledged (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

Yet, many Fijians were not completely happy with the existing system. In some areas, Fijians who are getting a negligible amount out of current leasing arrangements want to lease individually. Landowners feel that the NLTB is not looking after their interests (see section on land, also focus groups). Although the NLTB is currently restructuring rental proportions, chiefs do not want to lose this source of income and therefore resist change. Both Indians and Fijians are moving to towns because they cannot profit from the land (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05; see also Lautoka Landowners Focus Group).

Lastly, issues of social justice feed into the relationship between church and state. At the time of the Think Tanks, the proposal to introduce the Reconciliation, Tolerance, and Unity Bill was provoking public controversy. It was thought that the government's discussions with the Provincial Councils could not be equated with addressing the grassroots of Fijian society, and that the military were getting different views from those gathered at the Provincial Councils. The Bill was also creating hostility because the government were arguing that only Fijians really understood forgiveness; an argument used against a submission to the Government Committee of Justice, Law and Order from Interfaith. A problem with basing an argument on forgiveness was that it was easy to forget that those who asked to forgive are the victims (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

It became clear that there was a need for a systematic ordering of the social issues with a clear delineation of roles for the churches and state in order to avoid overlap. Here, churches should be using their prophetic voice to call for poverty alleviation. While the churches' role in providing social services needs to be negotiated, the churches should definitely be vocal on the issue of justice to prevent the continuation of injustice (Think Tank 3: 29/8/05).

While the Think Tanks explored and challenged both social structures and church structures in search of a more active approach that churches might take in the community, we were aware that ACCF members held a very different view of social justice. As ACCF members were unable to come to the ECREA Think Tanks, Vitolia Moa smsm, Paulo Rabakewa, and I attended an ACCF meeting. I later interviewed Reverend Sani, the coordinator of ACCF, on 14th October, 2005.

Immediately, Reverend Sani related Fijian land claims and colonisation to social injustice, saying that "the cry of the Fijian race at the moment goes right back to 1874 when Fiji was ceded to Great Britain" (Interview Sani, 14/10/05). In his view, most of the fertile land that was bought or acquired through sub-sale or at gunpoint by Indian farmers and other foreigners needs to be reclaimed. He is particularly embittered about the colonial decision to absorb Native Land into Crown Land when *mataqali* expired rather than returning it to the *yavusa*. Instead, Crown Land was given to landless *mataqali* who may be completely new to the area. Reverend Sani's own family was affected by this redistribution of land:

Land was given unjustly. I'll give you an example, I am a head of a mataqali myself, we got thousands of acres out there but there are around about 400 acres of our land - my grandfather was still alive when the person that went in to sit in the Government of the day said that there was nobody alive in that mataqali, because there were local politics amongst the Fijian families and whoever represented you would say that the mataqali was no longer legitimate. You write to this fellow. That was happening and we are trying to get it back. Now we can't (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

Thus, for Reverend Sani, the major issue in Fiji is not about the racial division between Indians and Fijians, but about the way that colonial systems divided Fijians from each other, at once intentionally and inadvertently:

Forget about the Indians. It's amongst the Fijians and, if the Fijians are unhappy, the Indians will be in trouble too because we will not give up our land. When the Fijians are satisfied that their land, their right to belonging comes back to them, we are a giving people, we are an accommodating race, and it is only the differences in the political field that are blowing out the racial differences (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

While accepted history suggests a complicated arrangement where the British created many of the administrative roles such as the *Roko* and the *Buli* in an effort to translate Fijian tradition into something that could be legislated across the colony (France, 1969), in Reverend Sani's view, there

was a direct contestation between the British government and its form of administration and the Fijian one as created by Ratu Sukuna. As a result, the British policy of educating Fijians in agriculture hindered Fijians in learning the art of commerce. Fijians' own system involved each party trying to out-do each other as a matter of honour, but this was bad economic sense. The British and the Indians did not learn the Fijian system of barter but "They thrust money on us. They thrust economy on us" (Interview Sani, 14/10/05). Thus, Reverend Sani continued, "when you talk about social justice, where is the social justice here? We were not explained things in our own language. We were not trained to change our value system things like that and things were thrust on us. So the consequences you see now, the injury" (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

Reverend Sani also argued that education continues to fail Fijians because it caters for only the "40% of achievers" who complete tertiary education and then find employment. Instead, he believes that primary industry, farming, and carpentry should be developed in the villages. To heal such injuries, Reverend Sani argues that the system has to be re-examined to incorporate customary law and dispute resolution. Currently, "if a husband backhands a spouse in the Fijian village" the police will not drop the case when the couple has resolved their argument through traditional Fijian means. Because legal requirements do not fit Fijian tradition, he argues that Fijians are "crying internally. Forget about the racial tensions with the Indians. The Fijians are crying, they're hurt, they've been injured, they need their wounds to be healed ... That's where social justice begins" (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

While acknowledging that many of the member churches of the ACCF do not respond to social issues such as poverty and prostitution ("Some churches are strong in evangelism, they forget about social values, some churches are strong in discipleship"), Reverend Sani personally feels that Christians should be active members of their societies:

I know there are varying views about churches should not be involved but if the Christians who normally belong to a church don't voice their Christian concern, then they are allowing the non-Christian to come in with their concern and their view so it is not right for us to complain or allowing them to make the laws. For example in Fiji, right now, one of the concerns that we have in the ACCF is the gay in the judiciary, you know that or no? We have a few people who have gay orientation in the judiciary (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

At this point, I was given a copy of a letter on gay rights written to the Director for Public Prosecutions and cc'd to the Prime Minister, Qarase, which was dated 22 April, 2005, and signed by Pastor Kanaimawi (the Acting Chairman), Pastor Gavidu (Trustee), and Mr Kacimaiwai (Coordinator). Drawing on quotes from Paul's teachings in the New Testament and Genesis in the Old Testament, the letter argued that sexual expression is only permitted within marriage between a man and a woman, and stated its opposition to "all sexual perversions that somewhat has been encouraged by the so-called 'sexual orientation' clause in the Constitution Section 38 (2) (a)." Alerted to this clause when an Australian tourist and a man from Ba were charged with sodomy, the letter expressed ACCF's wish to make the charges stand, with the threat of possible demonstrations if the charges were dropped.

Reverend Sani further argued that the ACCF does not hate gays but simply stands on principles drawn from the Bible, and thus sodomy, homosexuality, and prostitution are all grouped together. Further, churches cannot eradicate poverty and they cannot eradicate prostitution “but you can learn to manage to live with these people” because prostitutes and gays can be transformed by the church.

In his view, these issues must be responded to systematically, through deciding stakeholders, conducting surveys, and assessing motivations. An example of what could be done is shown by an instance where some women from New Zealand visited to counsel the children and taught the mothers how to sew and bake, so that women could sell their products and make money (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

With regards to social issues, the ACCF is planning to start a hospice to look after the aged, AIDS victims, and terminal cancer patients. They also have a prison chaplaincy and Prison Fellowship, one church also looks after the Counter Revolutionary Warfare Unit (CRW) wives whose husbands are in prison, other churches go to the squatters and give out food and clothes but none of their activities are advertised. In addition, the AOG church members in Calvary go to the sea wall every Sunday morning to feed the street kids. The Butt St Methodist church give tea to the shoe shine boys from Monday to Thursday, 9 to 11 am, until they reach the age of 18. Churches also feed street kids, one every Sunday morning at a creek and another give food and clothes to the squatter settlement in Vatuwaqa. Another church runs a drop-out school for those who dropped out of school because they were married young, thus giving them the opportunity to return to school, learn computer skills, hotel catering, etc. While most of these activities are charity-oriented, Reverend Sani sees this as only one possible stage: “for example, you give a person a fish, you feed him for one meal but our holistic approach is we want to show them how to fish, that’s stage 2, in our stage 3, which we are doing in the healing of the Land, we don’t only show them how to fish, we show them how to make their fishing equipment” (Interview Sani, 14/10/05).

In this way, the interview with Reverend Sani shows a clear demarcation between the ACCF and the Catholic/Anglican approach as expressed in the Think Tanks. For Reverend Sani, the central problem of injustice in Fiji was the impact of colonisation on indigenous Fijians. His perspective reflects a passionate view that Fijians must come first, before other injustices are acknowledged. Although he grants that social injustices such as poverty are not widely attended to by these churches, some of these churches are actively addressing particular situations. However, Reverend Sani’s support for the idea of training groups of people into developing small businesses and therefore becoming self-sufficient is the area in which the churches respectively belonging to the FCC and ACCF may find some common ground.

Interfaith Search Fiji

On 18th September, 2005, an Interfaith meeting was organised at the Anglican Church. Papers on social justice were presented by representatives of: Aum/Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji; Sathya Sai Service Organisation; Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam (Lahore) Fiji Islands; Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at (Association) Fiji; The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Community of Christ; and the Roman Catholic Church. After the papers, a general discussion took place.

The representative of the Hindu organisation, Aum/Arya Pratinidhi Sabha of Fiji (AP Sabha), defined social justice in the following way:

Social justice in the Vedic tradition means the maintenance of economic and social equality thus enabling the necessities of life such as food, water, clothing, housing, and recreational facilities to be made available to all in an equitable manner so that all might lead a happy and contented life (AP Sabha, 11/9/05).

In this interpretation, it is the responsibility of the ruler to commission state welfare projects so that everybody can strive equally for glory and progress. No one is considered superior, despite caste, creed or colour and physical health, strength, wealth, and possessions. In addition, natural resources should be used to benefit all (AP Sabha, 11/9/05). Problems of injustice include: inequitable distribution of wealth; religious intolerance; state welfare policies based on race rather than need; and the search for identity. In response, AP Sabha raises objections through written submissions and media statements; and educates the public through schools (AP Sabha, 11/9/05).

In contrast with the views of AP Sabha, the representative of the Sathya Sai Service Organisation offered very different ideas about social justice, relating it back to ideas of obedience to the law. However, whether the legal system dispenses justice is, in the long term, irrelevant because of the natural law of Karma. The paper continues that:

In the higher spiritual sense, there is no injustice in the long term because every action has equal and opposite reaction until the equation is balanced. In the short term injustices might appear only because we don't see the total picture. Only God knows the past, present, and future of everyone and can see the big picture that we cannot. When we see the tree, we are unable to see the roots deep below the surface (Sathya Sai, 18/9/05).

While this is a profoundly different view, which renders action against injustice as irrelevant, Sai Baba teaches to love and serve all and to practise non-violence. The speaker finished his paper with:

*There is only race, the race of humanity;
There is only one religion, the religion of love;
There is only one language, the language of the heart;
There is only one God, He is omnipresent (Sathya Sai, 18/9/05).*

While the Hindu organisations only touched on issues of race, the representatives of Muslim organisations at this meeting directly related social justice with themes of equality between ethnic

groups. The representative of Ahmadiyya Anjuman Isha'at-i-Islam (Lahore) Fiji Islands, described social justice as "human values in fairness, equality, recognition of existence of other ethnic groups to live in a harmonious multi-cultural mix in which no one society claims superiority over other groups" (Ahmadiyya Anjuman, 18/9/05). In particular, social justice was described in terms of law and order. Where there is no social justice, law and order breaks down. In this way, social justice was viewed as a natural law of civilisation, although the values that have been selected also reflect the structure of values associated with human rights law. Social justice was directly associated with ethnic relations, but other marginalised groups mentioned are those who choose to worship a different religion, women and children.

The representative of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at (Association) Fiji focused on the concept of justice within Islam but says that it is a "universal concept enshrined in all faiths" (Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Fiji, 18/9/05). According to this view, in Islam, the believer should act justly by following the examples of the Prophet, Muhammad. Muhammad is quoted in this paper as saying:

All Muslims are as brethren to one another. All of you are equal. All men, whatever nation or tribe they may belong to, and whatever station in life they hold are equal... Even as the fingers of the two hands are equal, so are the human beings equal to one another. No one has any right, any superiority to claim over another. You are as brothers. O men, your God is One and your ancestor is one. An Arab possesses no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab over an Arab. A white man is in no way superior to a black nor for that matter, is a black man better than a white, but only to the extent to which he discharges his duty to God and man... (Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Fiji, 18/9/05).

The quote chosen once again interprets social justice in terms of equality, particularly in ethnic relations. However, the paper also goes on to discuss *adl* (justice) in terms of a particular style of devotion to God without criticism or idolatry of competing gods. A higher stage than *adl* is when *ehsaan* (goodness) is incorporated into practice, where 'man' does good to others regardless of the treatment he receives. Thus, the motto of Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at is 'Love for all; hatred for none.'

For the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS), social justice has no specific definition. However, the LDS strongly defend the right to practise the religion of choice, having been a religion that were persecuted in Missouri by the State Militia in 1838 and suffering the consequences of the Governor's extermination order against them. Within the decade, they were also forced out of Nauvoo, Illinois, after their prophet, Joseph Smith, "was killed by a mob because of his beliefs and became a martyr for religious liberty on June 27th, 1844" (LDS, 18/9/05). However, the representative also noted that:

Social justice surely involves all Christians and other religious believers everywhere to take care of the needy. However, Latter-day Saints recognise that the problem of poverty cannot be solved overnight. Jesus taught that we will have the poor with us always, but He made it clear that we must take care of the less fortunate in all His teaching (Matt.26:11; LDS, 18/9/05).

While the LDS believe that in the importance of evangelism because Christ changes human behaviour (and therefore the shape of the world), they are also active in “providing food, medical assistance, lodging accommodation and aid to victims of natural disasters, military conflict and oppression” (LDS, 18/9/05). To do this, they work with the Red Cross and the Catholic Relief Organisation, among others.

The representative of Community of Christ defined social justice in terms of a just community where the worth of all persons is realised in peace with a place, with God, and in harmony with the earth and the environment in an effort to reach Zion. Such ideas are informed by verses in both the Old and New Testament, especially where they mention the end of all violence. Social issues in Fiji include: racial discrimination, poor hygiene and living conditions; religious discrimination; gender imbalance in both the public and private sectors; and discrimination in education. The Church is part of a broader movement that works on behalf of the poor at both local and international levels. Other work that is considered important is work on human rights, the environment and gender equality (Community of Christ, 18/9/05).

Despite markedly different theological leanings, participants attempted to come to a consensus in the discussion afterwards. It was pointed out that so much between the papers united the different groups, and that there were similar social teaching including notions of equality in the sight of God and reaching out to those on the wayside. In these terms, how could the representatives translate this into action? This led to a further question about why it was that secular organisations such as the Women’s Crisis Centre that were acting. A Fijian woman responded that the ideas behind such organisations may have come from the churches’ development of individuals. Secondly, churches were not into advertising their successes.

The LDS member and a Hindu representative discussed the problem of institutions, with the latter focusing particularly on the lack of educated enlightenment and the difficulties of getting people to listen. A Catholic priest added, “Often we get concerned about the maintenance of our own community and institutions and forget about mission. Non-religious people can raise that question – ‘Are you concerned about the problems out there?’ We must be at the service of others, especially the poor and the marginalised.”

Injustices presently creating issues include: the communal voting system where politicians stir people up and the President is elected by the Great Council of Chiefs despite the fact that he represents the whole nation; the racial division which has threatened racially-divided parties; and a Bahai member also mentioned the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and Compact for the Fiji Nation (rights for indigenous people).

A Muslim participant categorised people into different psychological types: physical – prone to emotions, fill up the prisons, unreflective like animals; moral – society and duty, obey rules, conscious of living with others; spiritual kinds of people – will do good because of their commitment. He

thought that the church should be to educate the physical type toward the spiritual. Taking a more systems-based approach, a Fijian woman asked how much religions focus on: family, schools, religious groups, and sections of government such as the Ministry of Education.

As a whole, the session worked as a consciousness-raising, activity-provoking session, where the Bahai and Muslim participants noted that everyone has the responsibility to stand up for what is right, according to the dictates of their consciences. In discussing what the present company could do, participants began to think in terms of writing letters to the editors and informing other churches of their views and activities.

Labasa focus groups

Social Justice

It's a good term, but where have you been, Social Justice? All this time. You just came in now? Did it exist before? How is it going to work this time? If it does, we must advertise social justice to let the people know there is social justice (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

In all sessions, the participants attempted to define social justice, although this was done within very broad parameters. Two out of ten in the youth focus group, two out of the six in the multi-faith focus group and sixteen out of seventeen in the squatters' focus group had never heard the term before (20 out of 50 total participants in Labasa). Second to the squatters, youth talked broadly about social justice in terms of: being socialised with other races; communicating with others; helping others; being friends; building a good nation; knowing each other's cultures; and being inter-related with other religions. Here, only the teacher in the group could answer more precisely that social justice was "to be just and fair across society despite differences such as race or gender or class, so that people are not victimised by society" (Youth: 26/10/05). In the focus group with displaced farmers, the discussion had to be translated into Hindi and back into English. A difficult term to translate, social justice was finally rendered as *insaaf* for justice and *samarjit* for social. Despite this, all the participants in this group seemed to have ideas about how the term might be used (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

Half of the women's group (three out of six) equated social justice with human rights and argued: "As a mother, TV talks about rights. Once children respected parents but now there are youth rights, and so on. There are a lot of problems. They forget what is taught" (Women: 25/10/05). Another participant argued that the community and society had become too open. In her view, people wanted justice and rights without knowing what they meant and they used them to get their own way in the marital relationship. A third who also talked in terms of rights argued that only God's rights matter: "Human rights are man-made. Now children can divorce from their parents. God's rights are his teachings of love, reconciliation, forgiving. What is the solution for that right?" (Women: 25/10/05). In this way, these women viewed human rights negatively as against the authority of parents or God. In their eyes, children and marriage partners use human rights manipulatively for their own ends. Such interpretations reflect an acceptance of current cultural hierarchies in age and gender, where God is a law-giver and obedience is highly valued.

For many participants (19 out of 50, without including the more vague responses elicited from youth and a squatter), social justice was viewed in terms of treating people fairly and equally. For three participants, social justice was about a way of relating to others that began in the family and assisted them to love God (Women: 25/10/05; Multifaith: 27/10/05). For at least five participants, social justice referred particularly to the need for equality between races and cultures (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05; Multifaith: 27/10/05). In this category, the responses showed resentment towards the preferential treatment of Fijians in welfare and in developing the land and towards the “Europeans” (generally meaning the Australians and British) for maintaining a racial division of labour in the colonial era:

Every religion/culture needs to be treated equally and have equal rights. It's in general, not just about land. In welfare, Fijians get preferential attention. The elected government is for all citizens in Fiji – the policies should be for all (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

As a farmer, social justice should be about rights under the ALTA Act – about respect. Land has expired without advance notice. There's no respect for my struggles. Justice should prevail – it's about not having double standards. If a lease is renewed for a Fijian farmer, he's given \$10 000 for development. I got nothing and if I renewed it I would have to pay a premium (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05)

I think of “social injustice.” There's a lot of injustice in every area. I think we're victims of society. In the colonial era, we took whatever was handed out. Only recently we started thinking about rights. Now we can see ourselves as equal. Growing up with Europeans, we saw ourselves as second-class (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

For another four, social justice referred mainly to the problems of poverty. One equated it directly with social welfare and looking after the deprived (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05). One participant directly contrasted the situation of Vanua Levu with that of Viti Levu:

Vanua Levu is different from Viti Levu as race is not the primary demarcation experienced by locals. Labasa is depressed, has no roads, people are moving away, doesn't benefit from overseas aid, everybody is in poverty, there's no money or place to stay, people don't know what to do. With expiring land leases, Indians are moving away but there have been strong bonds between Indians and Fijians in this area. The problem is a lack of resources (Over 50s: 25/10/05).

When discussing social justice, women in the displaced farmers group talked about their own suffering or the suffering of neighbours:

In my family, there's one in primary school, two in high school, and the father is the only earner. The lease expired so we only have a house block. The father has no steady job. We are experiencing struggle and know that others are too. We can't support each other when we are all struggling. If

there's a sense of unity in the community and responsibility to each other, then there's hope
(Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

It's the responsibility of every human being to help those in need. I watch a neighbour who struggles to send their child for medical treatment because of poverty. What do I do about that?
(Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

Issues in the Community

When the discussion moved on to major issues confronting people in and around Labasa, it was clear that expiring leases were the central issue and that many of the other problems currently experienced related directly or indirectly back to this issue. With regard to land, leases are registered at the Native Land Trust Board (NLTB) to Fijian *mataqali*. In practical terms, this means that the NLTB acts as the trustee for Fijian *mataqali* and that the final decision regarding renewals of leases falls equally between meeting the conditions of the NLTB and agreement by the *mataqali*. When a lease ends, it is the NLTB and not the landowners who give and enforce notice (Over 50s: 25/10/05). Often the tenants will be offered the rental of a houseblock for \$3 000, but many labourers are only earning \$800 - \$1000 for a season of cutting cane (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05; Interview Raj, 26/10/05).

If this has caused much resentment and many misunderstandings, a further aggravation is that most of the leases have not been renewed. Many of the Fijian landowners are prepared to negotiate informally with their Indo-Fijian tenants and sometimes even allow them to stay rent-free, but this situation leaves Indo-Fijians vulnerable to the requirements of the NLTB. Indeed, some of the displaced farmers explained that the NLTB has pulled down houses on unleased land, regardless of informal agreements (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05; Interview Raj, 26/10/05).

For Fijians, it is often not economically viable to continue leasing out their land. Rents are distributed between the NLTB, the hierarchy of local chiefs, and finally the tenants (Over 50s: 25/10/05; see also Lautoka Fijian Landowners Focus Group and section on land). Some of the Fijian *mataqali* have chosen to farm their own land, but the vast majority have let the land go wild, so that "Most sugarcane land is now a wasteland" (Women: 25/10/05). If a new tenant agrees to rent the land, they face high costs in preparing the land for cultivation (Over 50s: 25/10/05).

Further, many of the Indo-Fijian tenants have been cultivating those leases in sugarcane for many generations. Because of this, some do not seem to have realised that they were merely lessees rather than landowners in their own right (Over 50s: 25/10/05). As a result, the expiry of leases has created shock for this group of tenants:

Here land is registered under mataqalis but then each individual owns a section. The NLTB does not understand the situation and does not visit. Tenants and owners must talk and arrive at a solution... The NLTB should be reconciling the land issue. Indian farmers didn't understand the leasing arrangements – they thought the land was theirs. If they are given land to move to, it's far out and

there are no facilities. There needs to be a change to land regulations. Indians are losing interest in farming. The land becomes uncultivated and they need to pay to prepare it again and a premium on top of that (Over 50s: 25/10/05).

Very few Indo-Fijian tenants seem to have the funds or the desire to search for a new lease once their own lease has expired, partly due to predictions of declining sugar prices and partly also because of the fear generated by the political rhetoric in Suva regarding indigenous Fijian rights to the exclusion of other races. Those who do must pay 40% of the total lease up front to the NLTB and may wait up to a year for the land to be transferred into their names. Yet, one farmer also thought that the younger generation were less interested in farming than their parents and that they were drawn to Suva for a different kind of life (Interview Raj, 26/10/05).

In one area that we visited, these factors resulted in the renewal of only about 7 out of 40 leases (Interview Raj, 26/10/05). While many continue to rent house-blocks, many other Indo-Fijians migrate to Suva with their families (Over 50s: 25/10/05; Women: 25/10/05; Youth: 26/10/05). In some families, only the husband goes to Suva in search of work and remittances. While some of this population ends up living in squatter settlements such as Jittu Estate in Suva (see Suva Jittu Estate focus group), many of the Indo-Fijians who remain on the land and who may not be able to afford the terms of new leases become caught in a downward economic spiral as they are forced to work as labourers on other sugarcane estates (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

Participants in the focus groups aired their grievances about the NLTB and the government, who are seen to be profiting from the present arrangements as evidenced by their big cars yet provide poor service (Over 50s: 25/10/05):

The government is always talking about the land in parliament. Fijians complain. NLTB demand too much from the owners and the tenants are given very little. NLTB have big cars – they should go to the tenants and land owners. The NLTB needs to be restructured. Parliament talks about Fijian right but they don't do anything – everyone's crying. The only solution is to change the government... Things can be changed. The government should look at both sides. They only think about the Fijians. There's no mercy. They're telling lies. Change the government (Over 50s: 25/10/05).

On the other hand, a Fijian woman who had recently arrived from Suva to live in Labasa retorted:

Where there is a problem, there is a solution. Renting is like leasing. People must be ready for the day they will be told to leave. They have money and come to Suva, have houses and cars but say they're poor. Tenants should be ready. For years, tenants have been collecting money from cane (Women: 25/10/05)

This kind of response shows the frustrations expressed in Suva, and the distance between various understandings of the issues being created by squatters in Suva and the issues facing displaced farmers in Labasa. As previously noted, not all cane farmers migrate to Suva penniless but the fact remains that they have no guarantee of employment or of being able to maintain their families' needs.

Others expressed their resentment towards Suva-based politics and policies:

Prices vary from Viti Levu to Vanua Levu. Here goods sold for much more. The government should subsidise the prices. Instead we have the "Look North" Policy proposing that workers should be paid 72c an hour. That's exploitation at the highest level. They can't do that. It should start from \$3 as in Viti Levu (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

In the women's focus group, anger also surfaced about inappropriate Suva-based programs, saying "Reconciliation – the amount of money spent on workshops should go to the interior. Fijians and Indians are coming together without money. The money spent on workshops should be spent on poverty"; "Promises made by politicians are constantly broken. They're not interested in the grassroots. Reconciliation is only at the top"; and "The top leaders are big belly people who don't listen to the grassroots. You hear them on TV" (Women: 25/10/05).

The decline of the sugarcane industry has resulted in a general decline of the Labasa economy. If Indo-Fijian tenants were the first to move, shopkeepers, labourers, drivers, and small business holders have all followed (Over 50s: 25/10/05). Youth, in particular, showed concern about the lack of business development opportunities and the fact that no money was coming into Labasa. They are affected by the lack of employment and are likely to face long-term unemployment (Youth: 26/10/05). Nor is higher education was not a guarantee of employment. One of the young women who had studied at the University of the South Pacific argued that: "To get a job: it's who you know not what you know. A degree may not help. I'm using my education as a stepping-stone out of Labasa" (Youth: 26/10/05; also Women: 25/10/05).

Most young people felt that there was no future for them in Labasa and many also planned to migrate, despite the fact that they also felt it was a good place to live. In response to a question about how youth manage the crushing demoralisation that occurs with unemployment, young men and women replied in quick succession that they survive it by getting married and having children; that the Indians survive by doing their own farming; that Fijian girls go back to their village and feel neglected; that those with no money to migrate go to the squatters' settlement and cannot send their children to school. Another talked about how there was nothing to do (Youth: 26/10/05).

If young people and displaced farmers manage to get work, they face the fact that work in Labasa is often not well-paid: "Companies are not paying labourers well. Fourteen dollars a day is the lowest. Cutting the cane and logging is very hard work" (Youth: 26/10/05); "My husband's going to Suva to find work... The lease has expired and there are no jobs and wages aren't good anyway. If there's a job in town, transport costs \$3-4 every day" (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05). As a result, participants noted that poverty "is creeping in" (Multifaith: 27/10/05). A woman working for St. Vincent de Paul Institute added that, "People are coming with nothing to eat. They are really poor and need attention" (Women: 25/10/05).

With such obvious indicators of despair in the community, many are looking at their futures with anxiety. One of the women from the displaced farmers' focus group noted:

My husband died 21 years ago. I raised the children myself and never remarried. My children grew up and my son married but the wife died so there's no one to look after the grandchildren. So I do this. One of my questions is, "What will happen when I'm old? Who will look after the children?" No welfare, no land, no money, only a house block. I did subsistence farming but no more because there's no money to hire a tractor. It's \$300 (a month) to rent a house block (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05). High unemployment and high outward migration has resulted in increased pressure on families. Women and youth talked about extra-marital affairs; parents getting separated; children getting separated from parents; and rice whiskey, *yaqona* and marijuana abuse (Women: 25/10/05, Youth: 26/10/05). Young people noted that in the Fijian villages, men abused alcohol and *yaqona* while the women "sit and cry and run back to their families" and that "Women do all the work while the men drink kava and sleep through the day." This problem was not confined to the Fijian community as one youth noted that an Indo-Fijian friend who lost his wife in a flood sleeps all day until he hears the pounding of the grog (*yaqona*) and then runs to it. Nor was the problem confined to men: "Women also drink *yaqona* and the children have to work (and are suffering) in both communities." A young woman rebutted with: "Indian women don't drink grog. You have to force them and then they take one bowl. Maybe the exception is old ladies" (Youth: 26/10/05).

Students felt they were under pressure from their peers to participate in smoking and drinking alcohol at secondary schools and smoking marijuana at the Northern Centre of the University of the South Pacific (Youth: 26/10/05). The concern about marijuana consumption also emerged in the multifaith focus group, with one recalling a parliamentary debate that marijuana was now a problem throughout Fiji with 12 out of 14 provinces planting and selling it (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

If substance abuse in the community was deemed to be high, young people were also actively engaged in sexual relations. Teenage pregnancy was a concern to participants of the youth and multifaith focus groups. A young person commented that the results of broken families were teenage pregnancies and another noted the lack of support for teenage single mothers if their families reject them (Youth: 26/10/05). According to a participant in the multifaith focus group:

Teenage pregnancy is a big issue in the village, Nasekula. Girls are left in their parents' home. They have no care, no care even at birth. Some of the children are at kindergarten and primary school. You can see them, the way the kids dress, their disrespectful language. The Methodist Church is focusing on it, talking with the mothers (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

Teenage sexual experimentation not only leads to teenage pregnancy but also the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. One young person commented that, "Most are carrying a sexually transmitted infection and HIV but are too afraid to go to hospital" (Youth: 26/10/05). While this would seem to be an overstatement, the multifaith focus group also showed concern about the potential spread of HIV/AIDS and that both young men and young women do not want to be tested (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

Another young person argued that sex education was only taught in Form 5 Biology and, if students did not study Biology, they did not receive sex education. Therefore, a team needed to be established to promote awareness. At the moment, HIV/AIDS is not perceived to be real and, despite talking about it, stigma and denial remain (Youth: 26/10/05).

If high school is failing youth in providing sex education and drug awareness, the youth and the displaced farmers also discussed the high number of high school dropouts, because of the cost of education. The teacher in the youth focus group noted that many parents cannot afford to send their children to school. Despite the fact that education is supposed to be free, fares and lunches are expensive. Secondly, students drop out because of peer pressure or from victimisation by other students or the feeling they do not belong (Youth: 26/10/05). A woman in the displaced farmers focus group also talked about seeing their neighbours' children miss out on school and sometimes also on meals. Another talked about the need to send her husband to Suva for work to pay for education, saying, "Since the two children are in high school, there are school expenses. They're in Form 4 and Form 6. I am worried about the future. There's no assistance for school fees" (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

Displaced farmers also talked of their difficulties in paying for school fees and their resentment over existing affirmative action policies:

An example: in terms of scholarships for poor children trying to pay school fees. One student in Form 7 is very bright. There was a Fijian student at the same level – his fees were paid by the government. Government policy is not just. It's preferential to Fijians. It doesn't matter if the Fijian is well off. Everyone pays tax. In this case, the boy felt very hurt, as did the community (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

While many farmers who cannot afford to renew their leases become labourers, their status as farmer remains on their children's birth certificates. This means they cannot get the entitlement that labourers can get for an ethnic scholarship because it is difficult to prove their changing circumstances (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

Worse still, the suicide rate has become very high among young people. Two scenarios were given: that a boy hangs himself when his parents forbid his marriage to the girl of his choice, and that students suicide when they fail school exams by drinking the pesticide, gramaxon. Both are considered mostly Indian problems with the first scenario created by the Indian tradition of arranged marriage (Women: 25/10/05; Youth: 26/10/05). However, a Fijian boy also suicided in 2004 (Women: 25/10/05) and in another instance, "Last month, a boy working in a garment factory in Labasa was facing pressure from his aunt and hanged himself (Youth: 26/10/05).

Some insisted that race was not a predominant issue in Labasa (Over 50s: 25/10/05) or that race relations were getting better and "Fijians were trying to be friendly" or that "Indians are helpful in the

village. I feel sorry for friends who've gone to Suva" (Youth: 26/10/05). However, others indicated that racism remained a concern from both young Indians and Fijians (Youth: 26/10/05). One noted that, "It's still very separate. Only a minority mix" (Multifaith: 27/10/05), and a woman explained how she had adjust to her son's marriage to an Indian: "in order to work together you need to accept differences – for example, my daughter-in-law is Indian. Sometimes that's difficult to accept. We must appreciate one another but sometimes that's a challenge" (Over 50s: 25/10/05).

A couple of the young participants agreed that racism and race relations are worse in areas where leases are expiring and are not being renewed (Youth: 26/10/05), an observation supported by comments from the displaced farmers:

When I was growing up, I used to walk on the road without fear. It's not safe anymore. There's great fear and insecurity and one reason is that the Fijians have taken over most of the land, have moved in, occupied houses and built other houses. Fear will grow over time. If a stray animal wanders on to Fijian land, they tie it up and ask for \$30 (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

Thus, the fractured community of Indo-Fijians still working the land feel under threat by the practices of Fijians who are now outnumbering Indo-Fijian farmers and who do not share their practices. A participant in the multifaith focus group noted the historical structural causes of racial separation:

We're victims of the system. When I was young, people weren't allowed to mix. The sugarmill used to be the CSR. Indians were kept in lines, Fijians were kept in their villages, Part-Europeans lived part way up the hill, and Europeans lived at the top of the hill. When I asked the teacher about it, the teacher said that mixing in Barbados made the sugar industry collapse. We're still dealing with this structure. Even inter-marriage was frowned upon. I grew up with part-Europeans. Everyone wanted to be European. Fijians were nothing. When we want to become Fijians now, Fijians are suspicious. It's our own fault (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

If races were separated into different aspects of the division of labour in colonial times, the continuation of colonial structures has created problems of identity among Indo-Fijians and those called 'Others' who were not born to a Fijian father. One Indo-Fijian remarked that, "If I am born here, I should have the right to stay here" (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05), while another commented in depth on the absurdity of accepting mixed-race children born of Fijian fathers but not Fijian mothers:

My biggest issue is what I am. I am deeply troubled that I'm born here and called almost a foreigner. What will my children be called? I'm so happy I'm allowed to vote now. I can't understand how I'm called a foreigner in my own country and I'm called a Fijian by the Scottish who pay my pension (for serving in the British Army). My Fijian wife who takes the children into the village is accepted but her children are foreigners. If my children marry Fijians, their children will still be foreigners, and yet a lot of people of other races have grandfathers in the Vola ni Kawa Bula accepted" (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

Other issues, both mentioned by an Anglican Fijian woman were: rejection of human rights with regard to disciplining children and social issues concerning women. While arguing that parents should be able to discipline their children, she also argued against the traditional Fijian practice where women in the village always take their place behind the men: “The men eat the fish, the women eat the soup (leftovers).” She continued, “Our men need to be taught to plant enough for everyone because women will serve the best part for men. Grow more food” (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

The squatter camp is treated separately here because the responses of the squatters were very different from the responses in the other focus groups held in Labasa. Consisting of six Fijians, ten Indians and one who fitted neither category, officially an ‘Other,’ the squatters also appeared much less interested in matters of racial difference, as evidenced by a high degree of intermarriage not found in the other groups. One Fijian woman illustrated this by talking about her two consecutive marriages with Indian men.

Living in a cluster of houses between the rubbish dump and a high school, most were concerned about immediate everyday issues such as water and electricity supply. Twelve squatters mentioned water supply as a major issue because more than twelve families in the community were sharing the same meter, with one noting that, “The hose is attached from the meter to the house. Sometimes we use a bucket and carry the water” (Squatters: 27/10/05). Six squatters also mentioned electricity supply was a problem, but one family were using a generator.

Health also was a major issue for five participants, whether for themselves or for family members. This impacted heavily on income, with participants explaining that: “My husband is sick. The only income is from a son who works”; “There are no good jobs for my husband – he works as a security guard. I have five sons, one who is handicapped and hospitalised”; and “My husband’s sick. He suffered from a stroke. He was a fisherman” (Squatters: 27/10/05).

Lack of income, whether employed or unemployed, was cited as an issue directly or indirectly by seven squatters, who often survived through unemployment by fishing. A male squatter complained the jobs that were offered to him were all casual and this made it difficult for him to pay for school fees. One woman without husband or children worked as a house girl and a 75 year old woman with no family survived by fishing, collecting mud crabs, and cutting sugarcane. Only four survived on social welfare (Squatters: 27/10/05).

The houses in the settlement were built through church projects or by family members. Two complained that their houses were deteriorating because the wood was rotten, a problem likely to be aggravated by the fact that, at high tide, the entire settlement is flooded by river water (Squatters: 27/10/05).

Reasons for moving to the squatter settlement included: for the children’s schooling (4 participants); to try to find work (3); because the women married into squatter families (2); because of expiry or exclusion from leases (2); or because they were evicted or expelled from previous premises (3).

With regard to educating children, one woman came from a coastal village where there had been no school. It was too expensive to pay for bus fares so the family moved in order that all three could go to school and that she could stay with the children. Another woman came from Bua to educate her three children. For a period, the children stayed with her husband's family but had been neglected. As a result, she and her husband bought a house in the squatter settlement for \$700 in order to keep the family together.

An additional three residents came to find work, one because of the death of her father (who was presumably supporting her). While one husband found a job at the sawmill, which enabled him to buy a house in the squatter settlement for his family, another found work looking after the rubbish dump (Squatters: 27/10/05).

One woman had married into a squatter family and was squatting in another district until the government planned to build a road through the settlement. In a second case, it is unclear whether her husband was a squatter when she met him or whether she was forced into the squatter settlement when her husband left her for another woman. At any rate, the husband returned after the second woman's death and they have remained in the squatter settlement (Squatters: 27/10/05).

Another reason for moving into the squatter settlement was expiry or exclusion from lease arrangements and eviction or expulsion from previous premises. One family faced the expiry of their lease eight years ago. Another participant arrived as a child when his father did not get a share of his father's brother's lease. In the third case, the woman explained that, when her father was working for Oz Pacific Mill, the family had also squatted there until the mill had changed hands. The new Australian owner was concerned about the danger of living on the mill grounds and asked them to leave, so they moved to the squatter settlement 22 years ago. Lastly, a Fijian woman explained that she was having difficulty with paying the rent so the Tui Labasa told her to come here (Squatters: 27/10/05).

Most of the squatters were very well established. While one squatter and her family had been in the settlement for under a year, only three had lived there for under five years, two had lived there for under ten years, and five of the participants had lived there for over 20 years, with the woman living there longest calculating her stay at 28 years (Squatters: 27/10/05). As a result, only one of these families seems to have been affected by lease expiries. Nor were the squatters present particularly frustrated by other issues felt by the rest of the community. While they liked the idea of a more comfortable life, it seemed that many had simply accepted the life they had - perhaps a result of the fact that many of them had lived there for so long that it was difficult to imagine anything else. Squatters may find it difficult to leave a community, which appears to have become tightly-knit and which has support systems in place. However, the squatters' families were more vulnerable to health and welfare issues, which could only have been exacerbated by the camp's location near the rubbish dump, the fact that it periodically flooded and had few facilities, and the marginalisation of the whole group from the rest of Labasa society: the last of which was reiterated when it came to discussing the role of the churches.

with the men's groups because, when they are brought together, they drink too much *yaqona*. One of their successes has been a program where men are helping widows to plant cassava in Naviavia (Multifaith: 27/10/05).

Two participants in the focus groups talked about the activities of the Hindu organisation, the Arya Samaj. Education from kindergarten to university level was a top priority for the organisation. One tenth of members' earnings is directed towards these activities, which includes building a secondary school in Sigatoka and plans for an old people's home in Suva (Over 50s: 25/10/05). In the rural areas around Labasa, however, Arya Samaj was facing many of the same problems as the Catholic Church:

There used to be 21 members but there are only four left. The others have gone to Suva. We used to help each other. We have a monthly prayer and a collection to keep the little temple and to hold religious gatherings. We used to use the collections to help the poor, or for when there was a death in the family. But the four members are all struggling so we mostly just pray now. One of the members was in hospital for two months – they gave \$20 but it's not enough (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05).

The same fate has befallen Sanatan whose participants meet every Sunday. An *arti* (camphor candle lit at the altar and passed around to bless the members and for collection) is passed around in order to pay for the four major festivals Sanatan celebrates annually. This money is contributed to people suffering bereavement, but the amount now only comes to \$5, a reflection of the members' increasing destitution (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05). One of the displaced farmers explained how the Sangam board gives scholarships to the needy to fund higher education. While once the organisation offered 20 scholarships a year, they had to cut back to 10 due to the reduced funding caused by the number of neighbours migrating to Suva or overseas. They were hoping to give out 15 scholarships to the poor who show their academic ability, regardless of race, in 2005 (Displaced Farmers: 26/10/05)

Other organisations mentioned by youth were the Muslim Ahmadiyya and the Hindu Lord Krishna. Members of Ahmadiyya give money and rice to the mosque while members of Lord Krishna give out money and old clothes (Youth: 26/10/05).

Despite all the social welfare projects mentioned, no one seemed to be visiting the squatters. When Christian, squatters belonged to churches such as the Methodist, Catholic, Anglican churches or the Christian Mission Fellowship (CMF). According to the squatters, the CMF and the Catholic Churches have not visited the settlement at all, the Anglicans visited twice in six years, the Methodists used to visit but do not anymore and were perceived as only wanting to convert people anyway. Hindu squatters did not expect visits because the organisations they belonged to are not set up to look after people but rather to provide temples for worship. It seems that the squatters have truly been left on their own (Squatters: 27/10/05).

Lautoka focus groups

Social Justice

How can we have social justice? Village organisations should be in the background to keep the values in tact. Religious organisations have a good say. If they practise their teachings, there would be fewer problems (Sai Baba: 9/11/05).

While 20 out of 50 participants in Labasa were openly unfamiliar with the term, social justice, in Lautoka 32 out of 53 participants who answered the question had not heard of it or did not know what it meant. This was partly due to the fact that, in Lautoka, the focus group team worked with two groups of impoverished people in the Fiji Council of Churches (FCC)-funded Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (HART) homes²³ and in the Rotary-funded village of Koro-I-pita, while in Labasa only one focus group was conducted with squatters. Certainly, it seems that people in the lower socio-economic strata were less likely to have heard of the concept, social justice.

In the HART focus group, twelve out of 20 were unfamiliar with the term, which had to be translated into Hindi and Fijian. Participants who had heard of it responded that social justice was: getting together to know each other; getting together; peace and no fighting; children and parents being together; socialising, knowing good and bad in the community and sharing each other's problems; or being able to ask for things that were needed. One participant broke the concept down and replied that, "Social means convivial gathering in a community. Justice means fairness, one's right to socialise and be treated fairly," a second announced, "I thought it was social welfare," and a third suggested that it meant "to be fair with everyone." The final participant admitted that it was the first time she'd heard this term but guessed that it meant "to work together and love your neighbours" (HART home tenants: 8/11/05). In the other poor group at Koro-i-pita, five out of eight tenants present were unfamiliar with the term, 'social justice.' Others responded that social justice means: to stay together free from crime, working together, or that "When something happens like a fight, when you arrive at a solution there should be justice between two people" (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

In the focus group with Fijian landowners, four out of six participants were unfamiliar with the term, although one noted that she'd heard it on television and associated it with the law. Another suggested that social justice referred to "the authority taken in a community or the place where we live." In this focus group, only the youngest – a young woman – could reply that it means "how just your society is, of who is leading" saying that she learnt about it in school (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05).

By contrast, only one out of eight of the participants who answered this question in the Catholic focus group had never heard the term before. Five talked about social justice in relation to the poor, although quite differently from each other. For instance, the first talked more about social injustice, saying:

Not enough is being done for society e.g. the standard of living, the cost of living, there's a lot of discrimination. The poor are not recognised. At work, workers are ill-treated, not paid according to the required wage. The government is not looking at standards of work. They bring in expatriates

²³ HART homes are built by the non-government organisation, Housing Assistance and Relief Trust (HART), for the World Council of Churches. In the words of Barr, they "provide basic housing for the destitute poor" (Barr, 1998a).

instead of using their own people, so there's too much expenditure going outside. There's a lot of race discrimination (Catholics: 9/11/05).

A second participant pointed to discrimination at the hospital, where the speed of treatment was perceived to depend on one's contacts rather than on need, and also noted that the Public Rental Board was initiated to assist the poor but that, since then, rents have gone skyward:

The Public Rental Board gives high rents to low-income earners - \$9.60 to a woman with 5 children. She couldn't make ends meet and was looking for hand-outs because she received no welfare at all. The rent was so high she finally had to go to her mother's village (Catholics: 9/11/05).

A third participant related social justice to equal rights at all levels and in the home and the workplace, but again noted favouritism where employers only employed people known to them rather than judging applicants equally. This resulted in a bias against poor applicants in favour of those who are already comfortable. A youth from a mixed race background discussed unfair distribution of wealth, giving the example of Indians who are below the poverty but who cannot get government assistance (Catholics: 9/11/05). The last participant who talked about social justice in economic terms told her own story, saying:

Social justice means our equal rights in the community. I was working at the National Bank and made redundant after 16 years. They paid me out with \$16 000 which is only a little in contrast with the big debt that we have. We are now really struggling. One of my older daughters applied for a multi-ethnic scholarship but it was declined. They couldn't give any reason and she had all the criteria. There's only one income earner in my household, my husband. He's a drainer. I have four daughters. We are really struggling to have our house. I've reapplied at the bank but they want higher qualifications (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Two participants related social justice with the church or with God. For one, social justice is a commandment, where having faith in God will lead to justice in the country. The second associated social justice with being equal in the eyes of God and therefore helping the family and the community (Catholics: 9/11/05).

If social justice was viewed by most in the Catholic focus group in relation to the poor, equal rights, or God, most participants in the Sai Baba focus group viewed social justice in terms of rights, legal justice, political processes, or equal access to services. Three Sai Baba members related the term to newspapers, television news, and colleagues, but all ten who answered showed some familiarity with the term. Three mentioned the term in relation to domestic violence, rape, and murder, either in terms of fair sentencing or of the need for more counselling and fair treatment. Two responded in terms of political processes, with one emphasising the issue that the elected government was overthrown in 2000 but nothing was done. For another, justice was not reaching the appropriate people and that the authorities were not listening properly. Social justice was also defined in terms of equal access to the basic necessities of food, shelter, education and security, and equal rights in the home, society

and country with the recognition “that there should be no two standards in life” (Sai Baba: 9/11/05). Social justice was related to the principle that everyone has the right to speak and, in another case, to families rather than big organisations.

Issues in the community

In Lautoka, the overarching issue that emerged from the focus groups is urban poverty. Lautoka had suffered severely from the closure of garment factories (see section on poverty) with the impact exacerbating unemployment and poverty (Koro-i-pita: 8/11/05, Catholics: 9/11/05, Fijian landowners, Sai Baba: 9/11/05). Other participants mentioned government institutions not assisting as they were designed to do. Given low incomes, rents were too high to be affordable (Catholics: 9/11/05). In addition, like Labasa, the rural area around Lautoka has been affected by lease expiries, although here we did not manage to speak to displaced farmers. Instead, Fijian landowners talked about the difficulty of surviving on rents (Fijian landowners). However, every focus group drew out quite different aspects of these problems.

Although we did not hold a focus group in a squatter settlement in Lautoka, the mushrooming of squatter settlements around Lautoka was mentioned, particularly the examples of Naikabula and Saweni on the Nadi-Lautoka Highway (Sai Baba: 9/11/05). Some of these squatters were offered a place in the HART homes or in Koro-i-pita.

Funded by the FCC, HART houses in Lautoka are neat concrete blocks that consist of four one-bedroom units set out in lines, most of which were built five years ago. A further five were built three months ago and another row are to be built soon. The units have a kitchen, bedroom, living area, and a bathroom, which contains a concrete laundry tub. Many of the residents are growing small gardens of tapioca, mangoes, *baga* (a native tree leaf cooked like spinach) and beans between or at the rear of the lines. Residents are asked to pay \$5 rent per week per family, which, under normal circumstances, may include four children. In the case where one person is alone in a unit, she or he will be asked to share with another family who also must pay \$5 rent. As a result, while the units are of a high quality, overcrowding may become a problem.

Many of the participants in the HART housing project are on social welfare of between \$30 and \$50 a month, but, with rent alone costing \$20 per month, there is not enough to pay for food, electricity and transport. HART occupants augment their income by selling their home-grown vegetables, sewing, and many women also beg on the streets. In one instance, a woman was caught prostituting herself and was warned that it threatened her tenancy in the HART homes. As a result, 13 out of 20 participants explained that the main issue in their lives was that their income was not enough, even when they received welfare or, in one case, a soldier's pension. A crippled participant talked about her reliance on food packages from Bell Welfare and another explained that the mosque comes and feeds her (HART home tenants: 8/11/05).

Three participants were managing to survive because someone in the family worked. For instance, one daughter was working for Jolly Good Takeaway and earning \$40 per week, which was combined

with a welfare payment of \$42 a month to maintain household costs for four people. In a family of five, a brother brought in the income. Another family of four survived on the husband's income from his work as a mechanic. In a fourth case, the husband worked as a casual carpenter in Nadi for income for his family of five, but he was suffering from sore eyes, which was creating anxiety in the family. One of the participants also noted that the poverty they were experiencing was inter-generational, saying, "It filters down. I can't provide for the children and the children then cannot provide anything either" (HART home tenants: 8/11/05).

Health was also a major issue in the HART houses, with nine participants complaining about sickness in themselves or in their families. Health problems included: skin allergies, diabetes, high blood pressure, kidney problems, being crippled, having sores, sickness in relation to old age and suffering from sore eyes. The cost of medication and transport to the hospital was prohibitive for these participants. HART home tenants were also finding it increasingly difficult to get transport near the houses as the community is gated. While it lies on the main road, drivers are reportedly getting too frightened to stop (HART home tenants: 8/11/05).

Several tenants talked of getting sick from worry, with one saying:

We're getting welfare but it's not enough for the kids and transport. I have four in school and a crippled 21 year old. I pay \$4.64 for electricity. We're lacking in food. Sometimes I'm very sick. Fares and school fees are a problem. When I'm sick, I can't take the crippled girl to the bathroom (HART home tenants: 8/11/05)

If the poverty among most HART home tenants is at dire levels, one woman also described her frustrations at not being able to get a scholarship for her daughter because "scholarships are not distributed fairly." For her, this was unjust not only on a personal level but because "education is needed to eradicate poverty at the national level" (HART home tenants: 8/11/05).

While the HART homes were built as part of a Catholic project, Koro-i-pita or Peter's Village is a secular housing project. Koro-i-pita is a Rotary-funded project with labour provided by the US Peace Corps, named after Peter Drysdale, the head and initiator of the project. Rotary has a five-year development lease with two years left before the lease expires. While residents currently pay \$5 a week for services of garbage disposal, water and electricity, Peter Drysdale is currently negotiating with the NLTB that the future leases should be individualised and rented to residents for \$100 a year or \$22 a month with water, electricity and garbage removal included. Forty-seven out of the sixty-seven houses are currently occupied but the site is considered full, as twenty units do not yet have septic tanks. Most tenants are displaced cane-farmers but some are more transient, finding it difficult to pay urban rents. The search for tenants is somewhat ad hoc as Peter Drysdale simply approaches people who seem to deserve a chance by joining the community (personal communication, Ed Esul, 2005).

The settlement has been designed carefully and functionally, with houses lined along neatly bulldozed and drained dirt roads with names such as Tasmania Street and Geelong Street. At regular intervals

along the roads are garbage depots. Made of metal, the houses comprise of one big room with bathroom and kitchen in a separate outbuilding. At one end of the outbuilding is a laundry tub facing a fireplace. While there are not many trees in the area yet, a playground has been built for the children near the building used as the kindergarten. Only a few tenants have gardens and they are usually comprised only of tapioca because it is an easy plant to grow, although the soil is very fertile and has the potential to support much more. There are problems with water because, at present, there is only one meter for 47 households (personal communication, Ed Esul, 2005).

While the kindergarten teacher complained of parents being neglectful and that their children often did not attend, five of the other seven participants in the focus group talked directly of their problems in paying for education or paying for the children's transport to school. In one instance, a sixteen-year-old girl explained that this is the second year she has not been able to attend school. Instead, she is looking for work as a salesgirl. Her mother talked about bringing up four children on her own. Her social welfare payment is spent on the daughter who is currently in Class 7. Her son earns \$60 to \$70 a week as a joiner, which goes towards paying for fares and food for the whole family. (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

A second woman lived in a household of nine: the mother-in-law, sister-in-law, the sister-in-law's husband and newborn baby, her husband, herself and three children. In this household, only her husband is working and he works in carpentry. While the sister-in-law's husband is a joiner but cannot get work, she was educated to Form 5 and has worked in upholstery for two years, but now must cook and stay at home. As a result, she says that, "The children go to school but don't want to – people growl... We can't afford proper shoes, and teachers are not happy" (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

One of the men talked about his difficulties in finding a job as a carpenter, although sometimes he works for the estate. He lives in a household where no one works with his wife, four children and his father's brother (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

Only one of the eight participants in the group was happy with his life, saying:

Everything's fine. I'm a bottler at Coca-Cola. There are eight in my family: my brother, two sisters, my mother, and my sister's three daughters. My big brother is also working in Coca-Cola. The three daughters are in school and the family is fine. I want to go to Suva to work in Tappoos [department store]. I'm not getting very much money at the moment. At Tappoos, I'd be sending money home (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

If conditions may become crowded at Koro-i-pita, the participants came from much worse conditions. Describing how her taxi-driver husband, her two sons, and herself had been living in one room in Lautoka paying \$80 per month, the Fijian kindergarten teacher wanted to save for her sons' education, and so moved to Koro-i-pita. The Indian mother and daughter described living in their uncle's garage

until they heard about the settlement. Another Indian woman talked about moving to Koro-i-pita two years ago after living in one of the squatter settlements in a house with a soil floor, leaking roof, and complaints from the neighbour who gave them access to water. A Fijian woman who had only arrived at the settlement in the last month said,

I was staying with my father-in-law. The house was so crowded and the place was polluted because it was near the rubbish dump. In the house, there was the father-in-law, two sisters-in-law and one brother-in-law and their families – 10 people altogether in one big room (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

The two Indian men both described ugly relationships with the owners of the houses they were renting. Moving to Koro-i-pita from a squatter settlement two years ago, the first had been renting a one-bedroom house for \$60 a month but the owner was abusive after he had been drinking. The second was renting a cement house with no water in Lautoka for \$100 a month when he was asked to leave so that the owner could give the house to his son. When he did not leave, the owner became abusive, and he finally came to Koro-i-pita a month ago (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

After the main session, a participant who had complained of hearing problems during the focus group approached me, explaining that she did not want to talk about her problems in front of the others. She said she had worked in a garment factory as a machinist for 14 years until three years ago. Three months before the factory closed, she began experiencing an array of illnesses, such as swelling, pain in her leg and an ear that is intermittently blocked. Although she has seen many doctors and taken medicine, she cannot sit on the floor or in chairs and her hand and face continues to swell up. She now lives at Koro-i-pita with four of her five children (the fifth is now married). As her husband has taken a second wife, he only stays once a week. While the eldest son used to work as a labourer cutting sugar, there are no more jobs in this area so he has started in carpentry (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05). Clearly, of all those who participated in this focus group, this participant's and her family's experiences most directly reflect the decline of both the garment industry and the sugar industry. However, it is also clear that all these tenants, both Indian and Fijian, are continuing to experience hardship in paying for education.

While the tenants in both the HART houses and Koro-i-pita were clearly of Lautoka's underclass, middleclass citizens were also experiencing difficulties maintaining their present status. The participants of the Catholic focus group came from a wide range of Catholic organisations: Fijian and all races, Indian, and charismatic. The woman who had talked about her own hardship because of retrenchment (see above) also mentioned the high cost of living. A second woman added that, as her husband had been on the pension for 13 years, they had difficulty paying land rates. Rates were paid to the Housing Authority, the City Council and the NLTB. Everybody in the group agreed that a lot of people are struggling (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Employment is also considered an issue. As women constitute the majority of the workforce in garment factories, the factories' closure hit women the hardest because many of them were uneducated single mothers (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Two of the nine participants in the Catholic focus group mentioned education as a major issue. One talked about the difficulty for squatters have paying for education: “The government may say it’s free education but schools charge building funds, book hire fees, and there are bus fares to pay” (Catholics: 9/11/05). The second also noted the issue of school drop-outs because children of unemployed parents cannot afford to go to school. With little or no employment, some resorted to robberies (Catholics: 9/11/05). Another participant was critical of the changes made in education away from examinations and towards task projects evaluated throughout the semester, which meant that children without computers and photocopiers were left at a disadvantage. On top of this, students were not getting the grades they deserved. No longer marked by their own teachers, the students’ grades seem to be standardised by the government, with the result that some of the smart children at Indian colleges felt that their grades are no longer a reflection of the work they have done (Catholics: 9/11/05).

By contrast, the charismatic of the Catholic focus group argued that the main cause of the issues in Lautoka was a lack of evangelisation and that the focus group was concentrating on the material causes instead of the spiritual. With the presence of God, all the problems would fall away. The participant talked particularly with regard to accepting differences between the races in favour of equality, saying, “There is only one race: the human race” (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Issues of poverty are perceived to co-exist with social issues. Both Fijian and Indian communities were perceived as having problems with men who worked all day and then went out grogging (drinking *yaqona*). Men came home and fought with their wives because the men had spent all their money on *yaqona*. In addition, children are often left at home alone after school, especially in solo parent families. Said one participant:

Parents should at least prepare tea. Children are left to do what they like. They are supposed to be praying together and doing homework. Instead, they are left alone and the house burns down. Parents go out to their friends’ places, to meetings and parties. Children watch TV for long periods (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Television was not seen as a good influence because of programs such as ‘Shortland Street’ (a New Zealand sitcom) and ‘Desperate Housewives’ (an American mini-series), both of which show women and men in multiple relationships, and various forms of betrayal, which sometimes leads to violence and murder. Children become addicted to television and no longer listen to their parents but stay up late to watch these programs (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Lastly, one woman also mentioned that such problems were not helped by the current number of political parties, all of which promised much and did not deliver. Recently, the Lautoka Council held elections and the Fiji Labour Party was elected, but they are perceived as only thinking about their own families (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Interestingly, the Sai Baba focus group which comprised of entirely Hindu Indians had many similar concerns in that they also discussed education (4 participants out of 11 who responded to the question

on issues), children left on their own (1), unemployment (4), poverty (4), squatters (2), health and basic needs (2), and politics (1), although all couched the problems in terms of racial issues (13). With many mentioning several issues in the one response, they also discussed land issues (2), crime and security (3), and one also talked about fuel prices and bad roads (Sai Baba: 9/11/05).

For one, education was mentioned in reference to the need for school discipline in teaching respect, truthfulness and honesty. This participant felt that students' lack of discipline came from the home environment, where parents are not talking and listening to their children: "Kids are left on their own, watch TV, don't do their homework, visit friends, and their parents don't know where their kids are. Kids say relatives have passed away and they haven't" (Sai Baba: 9/11/05). Two participants thought that values should be taught in schools as they are in Sai Baba schools. One continued that, because parents are unemployed, their children do not attend school. While the garment industry should return to help create employment, there were also basic needs problems such as electricity and water. It was also thought that more employment would reduce poverty and crime such as rape, child abuse, and robbery (Sai Baba: 9/11/05).

Another participant noted that, with eviction from leases and the subsequent moving around, children lost opportunities in education and employment. Moreover, young people looking for employment in the civil service also face unequal job opportunities, because jobs are offered according to race. With regard to education and its impact on employment:

There is a lack of opportunities for young people. The young people have no money and work in shops. They study to university level but there's no funding to go on. Some take advantage of the government loan schemes, others don't. With regards to land issues, a lot of farmers got evicted and the children are suffering. There are a lot of drop-outs because they've moved to the squatter settlements. At the school I teach at, there's a growing squatter settlement. Because of the land issue, there is increased movement to the towns. There's a desperate need for jobs to the point that people will go for work that offers a small income. The crime rate is increasing. There are more people in gaol. There's much more risk walking the streets after 6 pm. It's no longer safe (Sai Baba: 9/11/05).

Others talked about crime, from burglary to child abuse and rape. One woman noted that child abuse and rape occurred in both Indian and Fijian communities and might be traced to a lack of education and increasing poverty, and that the number of prostitutes including child prostitutes seemed to be on the rise (Sai Baba: 9/11/05).

A more general view related the declining standard of living with certain medical conditions related to poverty.

There's been a general deterioration of the standard of living... Sai Baba distributes free wheelchairs. There are many amputations from preventable conditions. They are due to the lack of medical health education facilities and poverty, which means that when people have diabetes it's allowed to progress until their limbs are amputated. Those who are employed are paid wages below the poverty line.

Social welfare at \$30 a month is way too low to survive. It's hopeless for many. Fiji's a resource-rich country and people are suffering (Sai Baba: 9/11/05).

Like some members of the Catholic focus group, a participant of Sai Baba also criticised politics in Fiji:

All of the problems are because of the political situation. Politics are dirty and leaders can't sit and talk. There are no able leaders. If you have good leaders, everything will fall into place. In the last 5 years, nothing has been achieved. If there's racial tension at the top, it follows all the way down. People should choose good leaders (Sai Baba: 9/11/05)

In the members of the Sai Baba focus group, then, the issues seemed to fold into each other: where the major problems of land issues and the closure of garment factories helped to create declining living standards which then contributed to illnesses of the poor, neglect and abuse of children, a high school drop-out rate and continuing unemployment, and high crime rates. This picture suggests a problem of inter-generational poverty with lack of access to services and therefore high alienation from socially desirable values. It is also exacerbated by the racial distinctions perpetuated by stereotypes regarding where the different races belong.

Earlier that afternoon, we travelled to the outskirts of Lautoka to visit a Fijian landowning family and presented a small gift of *kava* as is traditional. Their overall concerns were very different from those in urban Lautoka, although they also feared violence, with their head mentioning his concern about the possibility of his grandchildren being abducted, molested or abused because they have to travel a long distance between home and school on their own. When asked about the underlying causes, he described how radically children's upbringing had changed from a life of ordered routine and manners (asking to pick fruit grown in the garden rather than just taking it) and hard work such as carrying firewood on one's back. Children are now educated, watch TV, and see people using marijuana so want to try it. One of the women added to this response, saying that there was no more respect for elders and that education brings in new ideas so that children do not listen and do not have to ask elders for permission. Children can later set up businesses that also bring in new ideas (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05).

Another initial issue discussed was the consumption of marijuana in the village by both Fijians and Indians (2), most of whom did not work. Some of them had previously worked in garment factories and are now affected financially. With regard to the closure of garment factories, the brother of the family head noted that this was a major cause of social disruption because "When they don't have enough, it causes all kinds of things" (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05)

The head's wife worried about other people's jealousy over her two educated sons working in the Housing Authority and the Port Authority, and an old woman discussed her qualms regarding village politics, where she said, "People use their church background to manipulate rather than follow. When a chief is installed, others refuse to follow. Children are also learning from this" (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05). Jealousy is cause for the use of witchcraft, which can be used equally against the sons who

are in the civil service and against a new chief. According to one participant, there are a lot of deaths due to witchcraft employed against a person who has received the *Tui* (paramount chief) title (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05).

Finally, the discussion turned to land after one woman talked about her anxiety over money because, although the landowners are supposed to receive lease money, only the *Tui* is benefiting, and therefore brothers and sisters are fighting over it, using witchcraft against each other. Currently, the lease money is distributed between the NLTB, the *Tui* or paramount chief of 6 villages, the *turaga ni yavusa*, *turaga ni mataqali*, and the *turaga ni tokatoka*. The head of the family continued:

Before it used to be \$100 for one family for six months and I have six brothers. The lease is for \$30 per acre. When I was at school and my father divided the first lease money, it was 20c each. The money goes straight to debts. Now, there are lots of grandchildren, the lease money's the same, but now there's nothing to divide. Now, it's \$250 per tokatoka per six months. ALTA (the Agricultural Landlord and Tenancy Act) doesn't increase this amount. We have to do other work to survive including being a cane farmer, and growing rice but the rice is from Punja, it's \$49 to deliver, manure is \$60 a bag. The tractor was once \$10 an acre, now \$45 acre to hire. People used to cut cane for \$14 an acre but now machinery does it for \$18 per ton. If you have less than 10 acres, you don't get anything at all. ... The sons (at the Port Authority and the Housing Authority) pay for food and for the mother. We were paying for other leases but now we only farm our own land (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05).

After the main discussion, he elaborated on the importance of the land for Fijians and local traditions of succession:

*The land is our security. It's the system of Ratu Sukuna to avoid Fijians from becoming beggars. We are nothing without land. With land, if we're not planting cane, we can plant tapioca. Sometimes we want to blame the chiefs. At one stage, we went to Suva to the NLTB and the man brought out two books: one colonial in English that said that when the father died, the first son becomes *Tui*. The book in Fijian said that when the *Tui* dies, the *Tui*'s younger brother or sister takes the bowl (accepts the position) – it's a big problem across Fiji including Suva. The tradition of brother or sister taking over is practised here, although women marry into another province so they often try to give the title back so that it stays within the region (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05).*

As such, many issues are besetting the Fijian village communities as well. While they are also affected by garment factory closure, land creates very different problems for them than for the Indo-Fijians who are moving off leases. At the moment, the landowners cannot depend on an income from the lease money, a fact that is also being brought up frequently in parliament with proposals such as NLTA. The Fijian community in Lautoka also faces the added frustrations that the law does not adequately reflect tradition in terms of transmission of titles on the west coast of Viti Levu. This gap between local tradition and law has created an ambiguity that allows witchcraft and distrust to flourish. In this way, many of the issues discussed here were remain particular to the Fijian community.

The Role of the Churches

In all of the focus groups but Sai Baba, I asked what religious organisations were doing to help and whether it was enough. Four HART home tenants and one Koro-i-pita tenant belonged to Muslim organisations that were part of the Fiji Muslim League. During Ramadan, the Muslim League is particularly active in providing Muslims in these settlements with money and groceries. While a tenant in Koro-i-pita noted that the Muslim League provided groceries and clothes once a month to some in her village, three HART home tenants noted that the League had not visited them since Ramadan (HART home tenants: 8/11/05, Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

Other HART home and Koro-i-pita tenants belong to a variety of Christian denominations, including Seventh-day Adventists (SDA), the Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Assemblies of God (AOG), Emmanuel Full Gospel Church, the New Cabinet Church, the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Roman Catholic Church. Eight out of the thirteen Christian participants said that they got no help from their churches and one said she needed more help. Five said that they had never asked for help and three thought the churches could not do anymore than they were already doing. Of the churches mentioned, the SDA, the Mormons, AOG, New Cabinet Church and sometimes also the Catholics donate food and clothing. On top of this, the SDA surveyed Koro-i-pita and is setting up a cooking and sewing session in 2006. The AOG sends a bus to collect its adherents for church on Sundays. By contrast, the Jehovah's Witnesses do not help nor visit, and nor do the Emmanuel Full Gospel Church. One member of Emmanuel Full Gospel noted that, "The pastors say that they are building a church and can't help" (HART home tenants: 8/11/05). Tenants say that the Catholic Church does not visit or help in the HART homes (HART home tenants: 8/11/05), although one of the Koro-i-pita tenants noted that they used to donate clothes to the house she last lived in (Koro-i-pita tenants: 8/11/05).

In the Catholic focus group, participants focused on their own activities, which created some consciousness-raising about potential activities for the future. Topics discussed in this session included how the church and the government should divide the obligations to the poor, dependence on welfare, internal splits in the local organisation of the Church, and the idea that members should do more visiting. With regard to the government's role in providing social welfare, three women pointed out that the current welfare allowance is not enough for people to buy food. Catholic groups such as St Vincent *de* Paul Institute try to alleviate people's difficulties by giving hand-outs of clothes, \$10 to sponsor children's fares and lunches so that they go to school. One woman working in St Vincent *de* Paul Institute gave the example of a mother with twins and two other children whose husband had left her. The mother therefore needs someone to look after the children and nurse them while she is at work. Volunteers are difficult to find during work hours because they are also likely to be working (Catholics: 9/11/05).

One concern aired was the dependence that hand-outs may create in the receiving community. One member noted, "Sometimes you give and people just want more. You give them something and they want everything from one person... You can't please all destitutes and the Church can't satisfy them all" (Catholics: 9/11/05). Others thought that the Church members needed to visit the poor more, and spend time with them because people are often left on their own (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Parish organisation into sectors in the Lautoka Catholic Church appear to be along racial lines. For instance, the Church has an Indian Mandali section that seems to be operating independently from other sections of the church. The charismatic member noted that the Church was divided not just along racial lines but also according to the sector and association that people belonged to. He called for the need to get the community together rather than continuing to uphold the current individualism (Catholics: 9/11/05).

While the Fijian landowners were all Catholic, some had Methodist roots until they married. One of the men in the family teaches youth in the local church, trying to get them involved in church activities and away from alcohol and marijuana (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05). However, a lot of other churches have entered the villages and many have converted, especially to AOG. Reasons given for the AOG's success included: that the AOG gave clothing and food to families; that they influenced youth and sent out free buses to pick people up for church every Sunday; and that people converted so that they could divorce and marry again, which is not an option in the Roman Catholic church (Fijian landowners: 9/11/05).

In all, then, it seems that most churches are engaged in charity work handing out clothes and food to the poor, but few are involved in discussions about the role of churches in changing systems and, if they are, their current efforts have no discernable impact on the people we interviewed in the focus groups. In this light, the Catholic focus group talked about social justice as not speaking for itself because of discrimination; as emerging from the faith within oneself; as within the family talking with the children; as going out and visiting others; and as equal rights. Two participants also mentioned the lack of justice meted out at the perpetrators of the 2000 coup (Catholics: 9/11/05).

Suva focus groups

In Suva, the three focus groups were: the women community leaders; the squatters at Jittu Estate; and a gay and lesbian focus group. Because these focus groups were much smaller than those in Labasa and Lautoka, it enabled me to expand on the usual questions about social justice, issues in the community, and the role of the churches, to incorporate people's understandings of how identities and perceptions of identities played a role in shaping social justice issues.

Social Justice

All the participants of the theology women's focus group were familiar with the term, social justice, having heard it at school, in the church and different church organisations, on the news, from friends and family, and in government reconciliation workshops. Notions of social justice ranged from "being just in the society", "fair in our relationships", "knowing each other and working together", "that all people are treated the same", to "working with different races and religions" and to avoid mistreatment (Women Community Leaders' Group: 17/11/05). A Presbyterian minister noted that she had been influenced by Liberation Theology, which says that, "God is on the side of the poor and oppressed. It's justice to lift up the oppressed. After the Old Testament, Jesus led a social revolution" (Women Community Leaders' Group: 17/11/05).

Only one of a very small group of squatters (four in all) had not heard of social justice and he was 8 years old, but had not heard it in school. The others had heard the term used in the movies, in homes, in towns, and in school. Ideas about social justice here were based on notions of “making people into a group, socialising, loving and caring for each other, treating a person fairly, helping and loving your neighbours (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

For the gay and lesbian focus group, notions of social justice were quite significant, given the Methodist march against homosexuality and their repeated attempts to march again and again. The participants talked about freedom of expression and equal opportunity and access to health services. For them, social justice is both a personal and communal struggle in the effort to do away with intensifying discrimination that is making their lives increasingly fearful. Since the Methodist march, one participant described the Methodist Church as inciting fear, hatred and violence. Such discrimination is making it difficult for bisexuals to admit to their activities and thus also increases the risk of spreading HIV/AIDS. Lesbian invisibility is also high (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

However, this group talked in terms of using the language of human rights rather than social justice as a “tool against institutional homophobia” that prevents access to health and social activities and against inheriting a partner’s property at the event of his or her death. Yet, in their views, human rights are not enforced in Fiji and social justice is simply a foreign word on television, which is talked about but not enacted upon (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).²⁴

Issues

Four participants in the Women Community Leaders’ Group responded to the question on social issues by expressing their concerns about whether their students practise what they preach, sharing some of the good things with the family and community, and learning about each other from friends, to church minister to children of different races. One mentioned issues affecting youth such as behaviour, rape, marijuana and alcohol abuse, HIV/AIDS, and peer pressure. The last to respond answered with a critique of government policies:

The government policies concern me. Culture, the people in government, the differences in salary – low versus very high, the attitude to workers. Workers are not getting enough wages, they’re sacked if they protest, and the issue of hierarchy. Some are more important eg chiefs, government ministers, white people (in Vanuatu, that’s still true). Men are more important than women (Women Community Leaders’ Group: 17/11/05).

Although a very different socio-economic group, political disenchantment also existed among the squatters at Jittu Estate, with one participant stating:

You expect politicians to see the situation you’re in. They don’t. They only come around when the election is near. Politicians don’t answer questions directly. Also, prices of food and especially kerosene are so high. And electricity, the politicians said they’d help with powerlines and they haven’t and that was the SDL. We also need better road conditions (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

²⁴ The concept of social justice was advertised on Fiji’s television station, Fiji One, throughout December as part of an ILO project on enhancing working conditions in Fiji.

Unlike other responses from squatter women whether in Suva or Labasa, this answer shows a very advanced awareness of the political aspects of the squatter problem. By contrast, the two other women at Jittu Estate talked about more domestic issues: from husbands demanding their way to not having enough support in the house while pregnant. One also mentioned the problem of paying school fees, such as a building fund of \$110 a year. Both of the women's husbands worked: one as a kitchenhand and the other as a carpenter - but the fees were still difficult to pay. The son complained that he did not like school because the teacher pinched him, a reflection of some of the techniques of discipline teachers are able to use in schools (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

To obtain a deeper view of the squatters' lives, I asked them for their life stories. The first woman explained she had been at Jittu Estate for 19 years. She moved here after separating from her husband. As she was pregnant and already had a daughter, she did not want to burden her parents. A friend introduced her to a landlord at Jittu Estate, so she moved there and paid rent for 9 to 10 years until the Land Tribunal asked her to build a house on an empty block, which she did. She said that this area was convenient to town, the hospital, two churches and the shops and that she gets on well with the Indian neighbours. Since she moved here, her mother followed her after her father died. She has two daughters: a 26 year old and an 18 year old who became a teenage mum 1 ½ years ago. Of her daughter's pregnancy, she explained her surprise and anger, as, despite workshops on sex education, her daughter had got pregnant at 16 while at school. Despite the husband offering to pay for her abortion, she prayed and decided to keep it. As a result, she now looks after her grandson (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

A second woman talked about how she had arrived here 17 years before with her boyfriend from Naitasiri to live in her uncle's house after he had moved to Australia. His family followed them shortly afterwards. After her father died, her brother came from the sugarcane fields of Ba to the funeral, and they all moved back to Ba for six months. However, she did not like life on the farm so they moved to Nadi to live with the in-laws and work in sales and waitressing. When she got pregnant, they returned to Suva in 1990 because she wanted to give birth in a good hospital. Of that period, she said, "We stayed with the husband's relatives and I gave birth. It was hard. While I was pregnant, I just wanted to eat but because of Fijian tradition I had to wait and eat last." Six years later, she asked to live separately from her husband so the house was extended to give her a room of her own. However, only this year, the government came to survey the road and told them to move so the future is uncertain (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

The third woman arrived five years ago to live with her husband who already lived here with his family. While her house is better than others and they do not pay rent, she says she would prefer to live elsewhere as she had a difficult time with the in-laws who wanted to over-rule the family. All three women agreed that their in-laws made life difficult for them (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05). Although wives are expected to subordinate themselves to their mother-in-laws in Fijian villages, in Suva, the hierarchy of the traditional extended family often comes into conflict with newer ideas about the nuclear family.

While the women in Jittu Estate feared their in-laws and dealt with personal issues such as separation from husbands and teenage pregnancy, the gay and lesbian group discussed the climate of intolerance that had grown around homosexuality to the extent that gays and lesbians experienced fear on a daily basis. One talked about the fear that his parents' home would be burgled because of his advocacy in gay rights and that his friends were paying for taxis more frequently because of the fear of being beaten on buses. As part of his advocacy role, he also discussed the fear that male sex workers had of the police, wheel barrow boys, and street kids. Sometimes even taxi drivers would drop boys in rural areas and make them walk back through villages that were likely to be intolerant towards their sexuality (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

Another who came from a deeply Methodist background talked about fear for his safety when he reads stories such as that which appeared on the front page of the Daily Post at the end of 2003, when the Methodist President apparently said that gays should be stoned to death. He said, "I was so scared. I started to lose faith in the church. I don't go to church now. I'm living in fear. I'm getting over it, but talk about the anti-gay march increases it again. What will the family think?" (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

In addition, if a gay man is an indigenous Fijian with land, one of the participants explained that he is likely to lose links to the land and the villagers:

If you're from a Methodist village and they become homophobic, if you go back, you'll get kicked out. When there's a lot of discrimination and hatred, you develop low self-esteem, become vulnerable and latch on to the first person who is nice to you. The risk of HIV/AIDs increases dramatically (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

The woman in the group had issues with her family because "The word 'gay' has not been mentioned in my home for a while." She talked about her anger over the hatred the Methodist Church incited against homosexuality and lesbianism and that religious beliefs were getting to her. She noted that the gay community she worked for is struggling and, as a result of their marginalisation, were consuming drugs, alcohol, and engaging in domestic violence (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

In the views of the group, the Methodist Church and other Christian churches promulgate an anti-gay message that they justify with very selective interpretations of the Bible. First of all, literalist arguments that injunctions against homosexuality are in the Bible do not acknowledge that the Old Testament lists many sins such as adultery and eating pork and is thus inconsistent in its adherence to Old Testament prohibitions. In terms of overall theology, the Christian Bible is supposed to be a book of love but, with regard to homosexuality, it is used as if it is a book of hate. The focus group also noted that interpretations of the Bible are profoundly different according to what purpose different passages are being put to. Along with the problem of translations from English to Fijian, there are cultural misunderstandings and reinterpretations. For example, one participant recalled a preacher who talked about big *dalo* plantations and used quotes from the Bible to support his

argument, although nothing in the Bible actually refers to planting *dalo*. Finally, Fijian culture was never written down by Fijians before colonial times, so much of the culture is lost. This may well have included a place for “feminine men running around in grass skirts,” perhaps in similar traditions to those found in Samoa (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

In the squatter settlement, Jittu Estate, as in some of the focus groups in Labasa and Lautoka, one Fijian woman described how, because she married a Rotuman, her children are classed as ‘Others’ and were teased at school. This classification disqualified her eldest daughter from getting a scholarship in librarian studies. The mother explains, “Then at last minute we found out she was a Rotuman and she had to give up. I felt bad, irritated. I told the Fijian Affairs Board men off and felt downhearted” (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05). As a result, the daughters forced her to take custody so they could be counted as Fijians. In this case as in the case described for the participants in the Labasa focus groups, there seems to be widespread and inter-generational resentment of laws which categorise the children of Fijian fathers as Fijians and the children of Fijian mothers to other nationalities as ‘Others,’ especially as Fijian mothers who marry exogamously (outside the community) are likely to remain in Fiji and thus their children and grandchildren will be displaced from any rights in land or education assistance.

A major theme that has recurred throughout this study has been with regard to race. In Jittu Estate, there are good relations between the races with one woman saying, “here, everyone mixes” and that “Indians from Labasa, the cane farmers, mix more than the Indians who have been here a long time” (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05). All the squatter women rejected the notion that different races should stay or return to their countries of origin, saying: “It’s not right,” “Indians can’t move back. They belong to Fiji,” “They were born here. Their ancestors are here. They don’t know where to stay. They don’t know India,” and that “Our children are taught in multi-racial schools. They live that way. Kids can’t change the way they have shared with friends” (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05). Moreover, one added that it was only in parliament that the Fiji Labour Party and the SDL fight along racial lines. For her, it did not reflect what happens on the ground and, in her view, politicians “should not talk like that” (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

The Women Community Leaders’ Group discussed oppositional identities that operate in Fiji, such as: rural and urban; rich chiefs and poor commoners; the educated and the uneducated; Hindus and Muslims versus the Christians; Indo-Fijians and Fijians; and homosexuality and the Methodist Church. Examples mentioned included: dressing well as outer sign of difference between poor and rich, especially between Fijians (2 participants); and the results of urban drift, where poor Fijians are coming to town with no money or qualifications and can only get work as labourers for Indian employers, therefore feeling looked down upon (1). One also wished Fijians would keep to their customs because it looks so good at functions. In the past, they and Indians were protective over youth, especially girls, but now the girls go out, do not listen to their mothers and get drunk at parties (Women Community Leaders’ Group: 17/11/05).

When asked directly about homosexuality, an Australian responded that homosexuals are oppressed in Fiji and a Tongan talked about the way Australian priests said mass for homosexuals, to the surprise

of one of the Fijians. Yet the Tongan and the three Fijians in the group were critical of the practice of homosexuality, although empathetic to the individuals involved, and this was reflected in the ambivalence of their answers. One argued that the reason homosexuality had become an issue was because they are now living together and same-sex marriage is creating an issue. For her, "Some churches are against it, basing it on the Bible. Other churches base it on rights" as if rights were oppositional to Biblical teachings (Women Community Leaders' Group: 17/11/05). Another talked about Methodists as being "true Christians" because of their literal reading of the Bible, but also noted that Methodists are hurting homosexuals but that some homosexuals now hold high positions in government (Women Community Leaders' Group: 17/11/05). A third noted that they could listen to homosexuals. While the Methodist Church was trying to abolish homosexuality, she was not sure that it could be: "How can it be abolished? I look at them as my children. I don't want it but they've grown up and nobody can say what they do. Some enjoy their life. A lot of people look at them and only think about sex" (Women Community Leaders' Group: 17/11/05).

By contrast, discussion in the gay and lesbian focus group revolved around ideas about the Methodist Church's stance being political and distorting the message of the Bible, about the socialisation of youth towards heterosexuality and marriage, and about the changing ideals of masculinity (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05). To begin with, one participant argued that the Methodist Church's focus on homosexuality was a distraction away from real issues like poverty, incest, violence towards women, health clinics, and roads in rural areas. Unlike many of these issues, homosexuality unified many Methodist parliamentarians because it was an issue that all of them agree on. Further, as the majority of politicians are Methodist, it would seem that Church was influencing State. This participant noted that the subject of homosexuality last came up before the 2000 elections, but was nastier now, in the lead-up to the 2006 elections. He remembered that, in 2000, there was also a scare over the removal of sexual orientation in the Constitution, which the participant argued was based on the misunderstanding that it was for gay people, whereas it was meant to be for everyone (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

The gay and lesbian participants strongly desired tolerance, if not acceptance, of their difference:

My name is ... [deleted for confidentiality], I am gay, I come from a Methodist Church, I am not adopted. They think that homosexuality is introduced, as if I was adopted from South America or South Africa. I don't want to be treated as a deviant or evil spirit (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

Participants in this focus groups also argued that, if boys were being socialised into a certain type of masculinity assisted by the Methodist Church (guided by the church in courtship and expected to get married at 23 or 24), they were threatened by societal transformations that affirmed the place of women and homosexuals: "It does threaten men. Women have so many options. This is patriarchal and the empowerment of women and gays. They're making their own decisions and men feel pushed aside. Masculinity is crumbling" (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05). Another suggested that Fijian society was scared of change, particularly of women leading the family because men were the leaders in the past (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05). Related to this, it was thought that the impact of the Reconciliation

Bill on women suffering from domestic violence may be very negative: "If that Bill gets in, women who are raped or who suffer domestic violence, when it's the traditional role that women shouldn't talk, they'll just be told to shut up and accept the bulubulu by the family. They do it for the family honour" (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

Much later in the session, the participants returned to the issue of the politicisation of identity, saying:

Since the 1987 coup, they've lost the human aspect of things. Now people are Fijian, Indian, Catholic, gay, straight... In my parents' time it was oneness but now the brother/sister is missing. Now identities are rigid because: 1) the misconception that Indians were taking the land; 2) the Bible is misconstrued; 3) the notion that gay people will eradicate Fijians. According to the newspaper, gay people are a threat to the children of Fiji because they don't reproduce; 4) the huge level of ignorance e.g. "gays caused poverty" because it was brought in by Westerners as were human rights. Human rights are relevant to Fiji e.g. no women empowered and no women working. I was listening to a woman parliamentarian who was saying that we should go back to the cultural ways, but she was not thinking (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

The Churches' Role

In the squatter community, the churches were perceived as having a mediating role in the family and in organising workshops, rather than actively helping squatters survive poverty. With regard to the difficulties one woman was having with her husband, she talked about how her husband did not go to church, just drank three bags of grog (*yaqona*) Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights from 6 to 10 pm. As he drank at home, there were often visitors who smoked in the house and her husband would turn the music up loud despite the fact that the children were trying to do homework. While she had not yet approached the church, she was planning to in order to get them to come and talk to him (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

Another talked about church workshops that have taught her to set priorities at home, and plan her activities. She suggested that the Catholic Church might also invite government ministers and politicians to the estate in the same way that the Methodist Church did. A third noted that Methodists do not visit individual houses at the Estate like the Catholics. However, she had never asked for help and never received any. The boy in the group had stopped going to church because he found it boring (Jittu Estate: 18/11/05).

All of the participants of the gay and lesbian group felt alienated from church institutions because of their anti-gay teachings and their emphasis on regulations rather than a loving God. Coming from very religious families, they had developed their own forms of individualised spirituality. When asked what they would like to see from church institutions, there were three main answers: dialogue; that they preach a level of tolerance; and that they look at gay people as human beings (Gays and Lesbians: 8/12/05).

Analysis

Social Justice and the Challenges for Churches in Fiji

In American Social Gospel theology, the middle class developed a sense of social justice to transform the conditions of the suffering industrial workers. In Latin American liberation theology, social justice was used to mobilise Christian Base Communities against state systems that perpetuated poverty. Since then, both liberation theology and the Protestant theologies emerging from the WCC have come to acknowledge other forms of discrimination like gender and race under the term 'social justice.' Social justice is now the term also used by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) in order to introduce change to injustices in the workforce. Here, it is equated with human rights, although human rights are more closely aligned to secular society and tend to be associated with processes of international law. Moreover, while human rights tend to be used as a means of transforming the plight of individuals suffering under oppressive governments and making governments responsible for all their citizens, the concept of social justice as used by the churches refers to collective human action against oppressive systems, and thus societal transformation emerges from the grassroots.

Many leaders in Fiji are more likely to respond to the concept of social justice than to human rights because many view human rights as foreign, i.e. human rights principles have been devised overseas, entering Fiji through United Nations organisations and agreements, and are then incorporated into the Fiji Constitution. For these leaders, there has been no grass-root discussion about local values. However, it is precisely the marginalised in local communities such as Indo-Fijians, women, and homosexuals who are most likely to use the concept of human rights to draw attention to the suffering they are experiencing. This then begs the question as to whether human rights are actually against culture or whether they are simply offering new kinds of opportunities for the marginalised to be heard. Although churches use the concept of social justice in relation to empowering the grassroots, in effect, their interests are often similar to those who uphold human rights principles, in that they are focused on repositioning the poor and marginalised communities. Thus, the question about whether culture is necessarily oppositional to culture is relevant for the church community as well.

In the Sustained Dialogue Workshop, David Robinson noted that the idea of what culture is will be different according to the perspective of the person asking it, that culture changes, and that processes such as sustained dialogue which allow groups who are usually marginal to cultural processes to speak. In addition, for him, social justice is an idea about a collective which upholds the notion of fairness and which appears to have a general application separate from cultural notions of morality (Robinson, 2005).

With regard to the first point, a woman's view of Fijian culture will be different from a man's, a Fijian from the west may have different ideas about what Fijian culture should be from a Fijian living in the east, and a Fijian commoner may have different views from a chief. Some examples in this study were when a Labasa Methodist railed at the political statements of Methodist representatives in Suva and others argued that Labasa was not like Suva, showing the distance between urban and rural concerns. While Suva politics revolves around issues of indigenous unity and racial difference therefore

focusing on reconciliation, communities outside Suva like Labasa are more likely to be concerned with the increasing poverty in the district. Thus, culture is not one simple unity, but a collection of very different interests in specific historical, economic and socio-geographical contexts.

Secondly, culture changes through time. For instance, while many ideas held by influential men in Christian churches about women are profoundly conservative (particularly in the Pentecostal/evangelical tradition), women do not necessarily agree and many are striving to change their roles both in the church and outside, in society. In the focus groups, this was most evident in an Anglican Fijian woman's view that the Anglican Church was making progress by incorporating women into higher levels of the church than ever before. This woman also asked that Fijian culture change so that women no longer ate only the left-overs according to tradition but took their place beside men (see Labasa focus groups).

Further, the way that colonial history has shaped and changed Fijian culture means that no contemporary Fijian tradition is practised in the same context as it was in pre-colonial times and nor is it necessarily desirable to return to it (especially considering that this would involve re-establishing tribal warfare and other practices which are no longer valued by Fijians today). Thus traditions are re-invented (a term coined by the historian, Hobsbawm, 1983) or re-imagined in the sense that parts of them continue to be used in new contexts to reflect more contemporary identities. This makes them no less important to identity: whether this is an indigenous identity, the identity of those whose ancestors were indentured labourers or settlers. However, what it does mean is that a return to original forms of 'culture' is not really a practical solution for negotiating contemporary concerns.

Having said this, particular traditions may be used successfully to unite communities, providing it is understood that such traditions may not be effective in aiding the marginalised and may not be effective in mediations across different groups. Thus, while customary law may be successfully incorporated into contemporary legal structures, legislators need to be sensitive to the context in which they are to be used, or new social injustices will emerge. For instance, while Reverend Sani wished to see customary law over-ride the current legal system, others would argue that a woman who is 'backhanded' should not be coerced to reconcile with her husband for the sake of customary law and the removal of a custodial sentence (Interview Sani, 14/10/05; c.f. Interview Ali and Kotoisuva, 21/12/05, and Gay and Lesbian Focus Group, 8/12 05).

While the concept of social justice is used to mobilise communities into action, in Fiji, there is the danger that only one racial group is represented by this concept. While the language of the Constitutional Amendment Act of 1997 on Social Justice is neutral, in practice it is perceived as promoting exclusively Fijian interest (see focus groups; NGO Coalition for Human Rights, 2005).

Moreover, the arguments put forward by the ACCF propose that the most important social injustice in Fiji was the impact of colonisation on the Fijian community (Interview, Sani, 14/10/05). Often, Methodist and Pentecostal leaders readily describe the Fijian situation as equivalent to that of the Aborigines in Australia and the Native Americans. While Fijians have undoubtedly suffered from colonisation in many ways, their experiences of colonisation have been relatively unique in that

the colonial administration recognised and acknowledged Fijians as people who had land rights and culture: an acknowledgement that did not occur for the other two ethnicities. Moreover, the colonial administration went to great lengths to insure that the Fijian culture continued, and therefore it attempted to devise a land system on Fijian principles, although this was and continues to be a greatly flawed model. However confused their work might have been, these administrations did attempt to go to the grass-roots to devise the system of land tenure that was to be legislated (France, 1969). Moreover, while colonial governance of land might be seen as unjust to particular groups of Fijians, other groups fared well from such administration, especially those who found themselves landless and therefore were given land that belonged to expired *mataqali*. Therefore, decisions on land made in the colonial era are very difficult to undo, without causing contemporary injustices to other Fijians.

However, this study does show the need for reflection and action on land issues. How this might be done needs extensive collaboration between all parties concerned. With regard to the issues of contemporary landowners, it is clear that the rental distribution administered by the NLTB needs radical restructuring, so that landowners receive equitable rents for their land (Lautoka landowners focus group, 9/11/05). Likewise, the way that the NLTB administers land to cane-farmers needs radical attention (see Labasa focus groups). Although many in the focus groups felt that the churches did not have a role here, there may be a place for churches in mediation between tenant farmers, owners, and the NLTB. The Think Tanks and interfaith meeting also mentioned the idea of the churches and other religious organisations acting as pressure groups, a conscience to government.

In contrast with the ACCF's focus on unity between Fijians and restoration of land and fishing rights to select Fijians, Indo-Fijians use the notion of social justice to talk about their own oppression and lack of recognition. Although over a third of the population (currently 37.2%; Fiji Islands Bureau of Statistics, 2005), Indo-Fijians do not have access to the same resources as Fijians. Having largely accepted their limited access to land, Indo-Fijians are fighting to retain rights to a livelihood, for the education of their children, and for political representation. At present, in these areas particularly, Indo-Fijian cane-farmers are currently living a profoundly second-class existence and are currently experiencing communal distress, as evidenced by statistics on domestic violence and suicide (see sections on land and family).

Thus, processes of sustained dialogue can be used as one method through which to start re-inventing or re-imagining both internal aspects of culture and the way that different cultures relate to each other in Fiji, in order to explore imaginative and just solutions to contemporary issues. As shown, the different ideas of injustice indicate the need for large-scale structural change. The challenge to the churches is how they can be effectively involved in promoting social justice for every citizen, rather than simply being involved in charity work and thus sustaining present inequities.

Before churches can meet this challenge, their own theologies and structures need to be assessed. One of the big challenges for Christianity in Fiji is the fact that, because of their historical contexts,

the churches tend to reflect broader societal divisions of race, class, and gender. For instance, the Methodist Church tends to represent the chiefly system, despite the fact that it has an Indian Division, and therefore has retained a very strong interest in promoting Fijians above other ethnic groups. By contrast, the much smaller Anglican Church originally entered Fiji to minister the colonial population and then, in Labasa, expanded to include Indian cane farmers. In Labasa at least, the Anglican Church is split between ministering to two races and classes.

Pentecostal/evangelical churches tend to be Fijian-based (although some have Indian congregations as well; Newland, forthcoming). In Suva, such churches have been incorporated into the umbrella group, the ACCF, which espouses the importance of rectifying injustice to Fijians, over any subsequent injustices to other races. Yet, their Fijian adherents in many of the villages have converted, largely in opposition to Fijian Methodism and its association with the chiefly system. The first converts in the villages are often women (sometimes the chief's sister) and youth, and have historically been seen as flouting the chief's authority (Newland, 2004). Thus, gender and age are both factors in disengagement from systems regarded as traditional.

Another challenge for the churches is their own internal structures and hierarchies, which often exclude women and youth from decision-making processes. Many traditionalist Fijian church leaders argue that there is a highly structured place for women and youth in their churches (Newland, forthcoming), and that therefore the values taught in contemporary education, business and through the media are 'foreign,' but such ideas need to be reassessed in terms of cultural change. Anglican women in both the Think Tanks and the focus groups were particularly vocal about this need. Likewise, village women who convert to Pentecostal/evangelical denominations may use such conversions to contest the authority of the chiefly system, and thus are not so focused on church hierarchies but on village hierarchies. However, these women are all involved in actively changing the structures of church and society, and they need to be acknowledged.

Moreover, youth are also faced with a changing world. Forms of society that are assumed to be traditional may not assist them with the challenges they face. If the views of youth are not heard within the churches, they appear to be increasingly alienated from such structures, and this is clearest with current church teachings on sexuality. For instance, teaching abstinence may still have a place, but churches need to respond more sensitively to the fact that youth are already sexually active in order to deal with problems such as teenage pregnancy and the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases (see, for example, the Labasa youth focus group). If they do not do so, churches may find that youth regard their teachings as increasingly irrelevant to their own lives. One way of achieving this may be a more intensive involvement of the churches in redirecting the energies of young people and aiding the development of qualities such as confidence and self-respect.

Moreover, despite the traditional existence of alternative sexualities in the Pacific region, young men and women have been alienated from churches in Fiji (and particularly the Methodist Church) because of the churches' strong stance against homosexuality justified by specific passages in the Bible. There

are two problems here: firstly with regard to the message sent out by Christian churches in Fiji; and secondly, the further alienation of youth into counter-cultures. Although the Methodist Church's desire to continue marches against homosexuality is aimed at changing the Constitution, it has had the effect of negatively targeting the gay and lesbian community and exacerbating intolerance towards them (Suva gay and lesbian focus group, 8/12/05). The subsequent message therefore does not reflect the tolerance and ideas of social justice of the New Testament as a whole: rather, it recreates the image of God in terms of hierarchical correctness. While leaders who hold this position may argue that individual homosexuals and lesbians can be accepted into their churches (e.g. Interview, Sani, 14/10/05), clearly they are expected to conform to heterosexual norms. Thus, the gay community feels complete alienation and marginalisation to Christianity as a whole (Suva gay and lesbian focus group, 8/12/05).

This is to the extent that many in the community see the Methodist Church's stance on homosexuality as a kind of decoy which takes public focus off other more immediate issues facing the community and which has begun to be used around elections. A similar kind of feeling was expressed in Labasa when Methodist members expressed anger about the political statements promulgated by the Methodist Church in Suva without regard for the land problems the community in Labasa is facing (Suva gay and lesbian focus group, 8/12/05; Labasa Over 50s focus group, 25/10/05). This shows that lay members of the Methodist Church feel that their church is out of touch with the needs of their community.

While several churches and fellowships (from both historic mainline and Pentecostal/ evangelical traditions) are actively involved in trying to alleviate marijuana abuse among youth (Newland, forthcoming), *yaqona* abuse among men is still prevalent among adherents of the Methodist Church. Women have responded by converting to Pentecostal/evangelical churches which prohibit the consumption of *yaqona* (Newland, 2004), but the Methodist Church has itself only recently re-evaluated the impact of *yaqona* abuse on families. *Yaqona* abuse now extends far beyond the Fijian community, with many Indo-Fijian men in sugar-cane districts engaged in excessive *yaqona* consumption. Some women in both communities have also begun to drink *yaqona* excessively. According to the focus groups, this has led to widespread neglect of children and youth, whether by ignoring their needs of a quiet place to do homework (Jittu Estate focus group, 18/11/05), by leaving them alone in the house watching television (Lautoka Catholic and Sai Baba focus groups, 9/11/05), or by neglecting young people's needs for adult guidance (Labasa youth focus group, 26/10/05; Lautoka Catholic focus group, 9/11/05).²⁵

Fijian youth constitute an unreasonably large percentage of those in prison (roughly 80%). Church groups are active in prisons, but emphasise conversion over helping to reintegrate offenders into difficult social milieux, given that, when they leave prison, they will be faced with their old problems of lack of access to education, unemployment, poverty, neglect, and peer group pressure which may cause them to re-offend (Interview Prison Informant, 9/12/05). Thus, churches involved in this area are challenged to re-assess their programs in the light of such critique. An alternative is for churches to work with government to create imaginative schemes through which prisoners may work in the community as part of their rehabilitation (Interview Prison Informant, 9/12/05).

²⁵ According to anthropological accounts, Fijian children in villages tend to be left to play in peer groups (eg Brison, 1999). Whether the criticisms of parents from the Lautoka focus groups reflected the breakdown of peer groups in urban areas or whether it signals the new value placed on nuclear families and parental supervision is unclear here.

Clearly, this challenges churches to take a more active role in providing support for children and youth as well as acknowledging the need to re-focus adults on their responsibilities. It means that, in the contemporary setting, children and youth need to know that they are listened to. While traditional responses in both the Fijian and the Indo-Fijian communities expect youth and children to accept the authority of their parents, families are challenged by the new social contexts in which children and youth are raised. A common complaint that repeatedly surfaced in the focus groups was the extent to which youth did not listen. Yet, youth and children have had little representation of their own needs in a changing world.

On the other hand, this complaint and the complaint about mother-in-laws (Jittu Estate focus group, 18/11/05) may be indicating the stresses on Fijian families as they change from extended family groups (*mataqali*) of the village to the urban nuclear family. If young people lived in a tight hierarchical web of kinship relations in the village and spend a lot of time with their related peers, in the cities they are more likely to end up alone or without the support of extended kin and may find themselves relying on unrelated or loosely related peers much more. Likewise, in the cities, Fijian wives expect to be the most important female voice in their husbands' lives, unlike in the villages, where mother-in-laws have much more influence (while it seems that the mother-in-law has retained influence in Indo-Fijian families; Adinkrah, 2001). ACCF member churches also tend to promote the nuclear family over the extended family (Newland, forthcoming). Further, in both communities, men and women's roles in the family are changing as women become more educated and more likely to be involved in paid work. As such, the very shape of the family is in transition.

Another repeated theme in the focus groups in Lautoka, Labasa, and Suva was the impossible cost of education: whether in terms of building funds, transport, books, or school uniforms. The scholarship system is seen as inequitable because Fijians can access scholarships without means-testing while many Indo-Fijians are facing financial hardship but have no access to government help (Labasa displaced farmers focus group, 26/10/05) and because Fijian privileges are only given to children of Fijian fathers, not Fijian mothers (Labasa multifaith focus group, 27/10/05; Jittu Estate focus group, 18/11/05). Yet, universally education was seen as a primary way out of inter-generational poverty. As the churches operate many of the schools in Fiji, such ideas challenge churches to become involved in making education more accessible and more relevant to the needs of their communities.

Non-discriminatory opportunities in employment are also important. Currently, employment opportunities exist along racial lines, where, for instance, one is more likely to get a job in the civil service or the military if one is Fijian or more likely to get a job in business if one is Indo-Fijian. While there are affirmative action schemes in place for Fijians in business (for instance, in loans, see Ratuva, 2000), many might argue the need for affirmative action schemes for Indo-Fijians in the civil service and the military, for instance. This depends on the overall vision for the future and stability of Fiji social, economic and political life. While Fijians are the indigenous people of Fiji, Fiji is now home for Indo-Fijians and others who are not categorised as Fijian, and, while the value of the indigenous community should be acknowledged, the value of other communities also need to be acknowledged, if administrative structures of Fiji are to move beyond the rigid colonial categories. Indeed, as Fijian

women with children who are categorised as 'others' attest, the whole issue of what it means to be Fijian needs to be reassessed in relation to the other races in Fiji. To begin with, the idea of 'race' should be constantly questioned (and is by some Fijian academics such as Steven Ratuva, 2002) at the same time that government structures are systematically analysed and transformed in order to promote a less rigidly stratified society. Church communities are challenged here to participate in this process, whether in pressure groups or by encouraging debate.

Currently, Fiji is undergoing vast transformation, moving away from a plantation economy based on sugar, to participate in international industries such as tourism and garment production. This transition is producing widespread poverty, as large populations move to the cities without sufficient training in the skills needed for emergent industries. The proliferating squatter settlements are a very visible sign of this transformation. Clearly, charity remains an important role for churches. However, churches are also challenged to participate in changing the outcomes for families who find themselves increasingly impoverished. One area of agreement between the churches seems to be with regard to the importance of training people in household industries to help them become self-sufficient (Think Tanks, 2005; Interview Sani, 14/10/05). Another may involve holding discussions with government about finding methods to redistribute land and build houses in order to create better living conditions for squatters (Think Tanks, 2005).

At present, some churches are involved in these activities, but, because churches do not advertise their work, such information is difficult to find. To prevent duplication and to enhance various efforts, a valuable ecumenical approach may be to start a register, which simply records churches' social projects and individuals who may be contacted for further information.

Conclusion: A Challenge to the Churches

The findings of this project suggest that, if churches are to be actively involved in encouraging social justice in Fiji, there are several areas which should be evaluated:

- Oppressive structures in churches need to be identified and changed. These structures may inhibit the contribution of women, youth, and other marginalised groups.
- Churches also need to assess their role in the community. What kind of work are they currently involved in? Does their work over-emphasise charity and under-emphasise the systemic problems that lead to social justice issues? How can churches work together in a way that leads to a more just society for every citizen?
- What kind of relationship should the churches have with the State? As evident in this research, the ACCF is already closely associated with the present government, both of which promote Fijian paramountcy. For the ACCF, the primary injustice is related to the way Fijian land was distributed at colonisation. However, this report shows the issues that have emerged for both Fijians and Indo-Fijians. This suggests that churches should be prepared to look at both sides of the land question. Churches may operate separately as pressure groups or participate with the Ministry of Reconciliation. Some have chosen to opt out of any relation with the State whatsoever (for example, SDA). Social justice issues indicated by this report suggest a need for independence at some level, in order that the churches can offer a critical role.
- What role should churches take with regard to the racial divisions in Fiji? Many of the structural elements in organisations, land tenure, education, etc, are based on ideas about race as immutable. Ultimately, emergent issues show the need for cross-racial dialogue. As some Indo-Fijians are Christian, churches can work among their members as well as promoting dialogue between Christian churches and Hindu and Muslim organisations. Some of this has already begun within the reconciliation processes, but it needs to be continued and reinforced.
- Churches may play a role in redefining the notion of race with regard to Fijian-ness. Currently, Fijian mothers who have children to fathers of other races cannot register their children as Fijian. These children (and their children) are therefore excluded from the rights that children of Fijian fathers have, such as scholarships, entitlement to *mataqali* land, etc. This distinction sits oddly with the fact that, even in the early colonial era, matrilineal descent was recognised in some areas. Moreover, the fact that Fijian women who marry outsiders are more likely to remain in Fiji thus suggests that their children should be registered as Fijian.
- Churches could provide a stronger role as pressure groups against publicly asserted racism. Race continues to be used by politicians as a political device for furthering the interests of particular groups over others. Our focus groups showed that many 'ordinary' people did not agree with this.
- Structures of land tenure have been inherited from the colonial order and now benefit only a few. Many Fijians can no longer make a living from their land, and the mass expiries of leases have exacerbated hardship for Indo-Fijian tenant farmers. For churches, the issues pertaining to land will need multiple strategies, that may include charitable works for families in need but there also needs to be a systemic vision. While locals often responded that there was no role in churches here, in Latin America, churches were proactive in supporting peasantry in land reform. They

formed CCBs, promoted peasant awareness of structures and encouraged mobilisation against oppressive systems. In Fiji, churches may not feel the need to go to these lengths, but there is a need for critical assessment of the way rural leases are structured and the way that squatters are treated in urban areas. A balance should be applied with regard to the rights of the indigenous and equitable conditions for all. As with reconciliation, churches may find a role in providing space for dialogue between parties.

- Another issue is the rising level of poverty, much of it a result of lease expiries and the closure of garment factories. People need access to education and re-training schemes. Most church representatives appear to be interested in encouraging micro-businesses and independence. This may be an area of promise for inter-church activities. Health and living standards also need to be raised, particularly in squatter settlements. Projects such as the HART homes and the Rotary funded housing have made an important contribution. Few Christian churches are visiting such settlements and providing help, sometimes because their own members are also sliding into poverty. Here, strategic help is needed.
- With regard to education, these findings suggest that more people need access to education. At present, scholarships appear to be only accessible to Fijians who have a Fijian father, therefore ignoring the needs of children with Fijian mothers and Indo-Fijians who are sliding into poverty. Centralised marking is also becoming an issue as it was felt that Indo-Fijian students are being further marginalised (Lautoka Catholics, 9/11/05). As many schools are church schools, churches must play an active role in discussing both issues of access and marking standards to ensure that they are equitable despite race, status, or gender.
- Domestic violence is a major issue in families, and women and children often become its victims. Families are in need of immediate practical support structures such as facilities for women and children encountering domestic violence and day-care centres for working parents. There is also a need for a critical assessment of gender roles and how they are institutionalised, and efforts to create new ideas about masculinity, where physical violence is no longer an accepted part of social life. The rise in domestic violence in years of high lease expiries also suggests that families of evicted Indo-Fijian tenant farmers are intensely distressed. Therefore, a structural approach which seeks to alleviate the plight of such families may also aid in lowering rates of domestic violence.
- Youth also need support as evidenced by our focus groups, particularly with regard to teenage pregnancy, marijuana and kava abuse, HIV/AIDS, and other sexually transmitted diseases. Some churches (for example, SDA and the Methodist Church) have been involved in promoting teenage awareness and/or supporting pregnant teenage girls. The findings from the youth focus group in Labasa (26/10/05) suggest that teenagers are indulging in risky behaviours because of: their parents' lack of concern, peer pressure and boredom. Some churches in Lautoka and Labasa are attempting to create youth groups to divert youth from risky practices (Labasa multifaith group, 27/10/05; Lautoka landowners group, 9/11/05). These findings suggest that churches could be more involved with youth in ways that will help young men and women realise their potential and the possibilities in their lives.
- With regard to homosexuality, the politicised nature of it has alienated the gay and lesbian community. It is recommended that churches focus on sending a message of tolerance towards all its communities, especially around election-times, in the spirit of promoting peace among communities, regardless of religion or race, and not necessarily for evangelical purposes.

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